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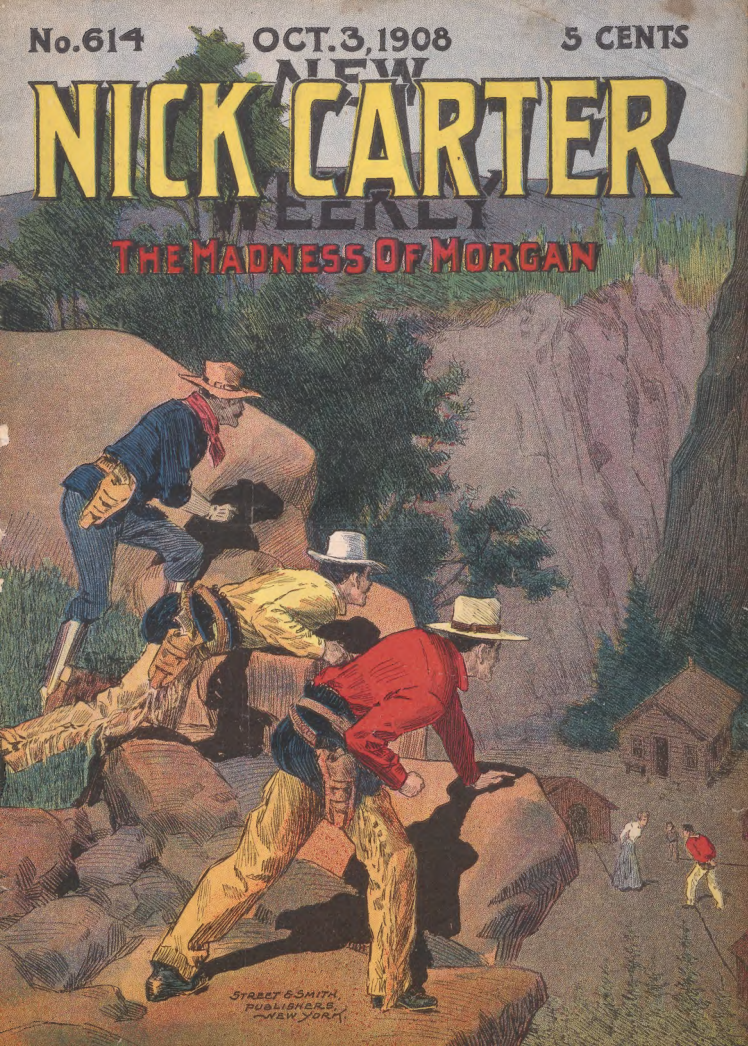
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE MADNESS OF MORGAN



NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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THE MADNESS OF MORGAN;

OR,

NICK CARTER TO THE RESCUE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

NICK CARTER GOES WEST.

"I knew you would come, Nick Carter," exclaimed Dick Hartly, cow-puncher, rising from his seat near the fire and coming forward with hasty stride toward where Nick Carter and his companion, who was Con Meyer, another cow-puncher and side-partner to Hartly, were dismounting from their horses.

The time was a couple of hours after dark in the evening. The season of the year was the last week in September. The place was a lonely spot in Shoshone County, Idaho, about midway between Pot Mountain and the Bitter Root Range, which as everybody knows, forms a dividing line between the States of Idaho and Montana.

Meyer and Nick had left Wallace on the line of the Northern Pacific railway about noon of the preceding day and so had been traveling on their horses continually since that time, save for the hours of darkness during which they had camped the preceding night; and when it is said that they were now only a hundred miles from Wallace as the crow flies, although in reality they had traveled many more than that in order to cover the snake-like route they had been obliged to follow, some of the difficulties of the trail by which they had passed may be imagined.

Con Meyer had gone to Wallace to meet the detective when he should arrive, as the day for that event had been previously set as well as the hour thereof.

Shoshone County in Idaho is literally a wilderness and particularly that part of it in which our friends were, for the time being, located.

It is one of the fierce jungle of mountain peaks and rock ridges, of deep cañons and precipitous bluffs, of mountain torrents, and falls both great and small, and it is the home of almost every character of wild beast that is known to exist in the northwestern part of the United States. The lowlands between the mountains, for here and there is a spot of lowland, is rich with grass, and the forest abounds with all kinds of game.

It may readily be surmised, however, that none of these attractive qualities of the place had lured Nick Carter thither, for it was rarely that the detective had time or opportunity to indulge himself in anything that might be called a vacation.

In a word, the reason for his being there was a letter which he had received from Dick Hartly some time previously and to which he had responded immediately.

Nor is it necessary that we should repeat the letter here. It is only necessary that we give some part of the substance of it which was to the effect that one Paul Brennan with his wife and boy, now nearing the age of four, had been stolen and carried away from their home across the Bitter Root Range of mountains in Missoula County, Montana, whither Paul Brennan had gone and settled upon a ranch that was given to him by his father-in-law shortly after a series of exciting events that once had happened to him in New Mexico.*

The letter from Hartly to Nick Carter had been posted at Wallace, Idaho, and had told the detective in effect that Hartley and Meyer were together, and that they had succeeded in trailing the lost ones as far as the southern part of Shoshone County, and had asked the detective if he could possibly spare the time to come out at once to Idaho in the hope of rescuing Brennan and his wife and child from the hands of the man into whose power they had fallen.

The letter then went on to state that this man was Tom Morgan, one time manager for Eighty-three Ranch then owned by a certain United States Senator, whose daughter Mrs. Paul Brennan was.

The letter stated further that Tom Morgan, after his release from jail in New Mexico where he had been confined on a charge of the attempted murder of Brennan, and from which he was liberated because Brennan had refused to prosecute him or to testify against him unless compelled to do so, had gone mad apparently and it was supposed for a long time that he had either killed himself or had left that part of the country.

The fact that he had ill-treated his own family, and had committed other acts of brutality, has nothing to do with this story save to carry out the idea that he man was undoubtedly demented, and this the reader should bear in mind as the explanation of many of the incidents of the ensuing recital which would not otherwise seem logical or real.

It so happened that when the deteetive received this letter he was glad of the opportunity to get away from New York for a time, and glad too of an excuse for spending a week or two among the mountains of the Northwest, than which there is no more wholesome climate in all the world although it is sometimes rigorous and severe.

As soon as greetings were exchanged, and they were hearty ones, it may be said, Hartly began rapidly to give an account of the events which had resulted in his writing and sending the letter, but Nick Carter held up one hand in protest and exclaimed, laughingly, as he did so:

"Not now, Dick. Don't tell me a word why you brought me here until after I have eaten, for I am as hungry as a bear and I am sure that Con is too."

And so the three men chatted together while a hearty meal of venison steak was prepared, and it should be said right here that the two travelers just lately arrived did full justice to it.

But at last it was finished. Pipes were lighted, comfortable positions around the fire were secured, for the night was chilly, and then Nick Carter remarked:

"Now, Hartly, if you don't mind, I'd like to hear the particulars about this matter before I go to sleep."

"I reckon I pretty near wrote that all down in that letter," was the response.

"Never mind that, Dick. Tell me the story again as if you hadn't written the letter."

"Well, it was this way, Carter: I suppose you remember, don't you, that you left Brenny and his wife and kid at the Navajo Indian village when you went east?"

"Certainly," replied the detective.

"Well, me and Con stayed with them after we got back from taking Morgan to Largo to the sheriff until Brenny was able to travel some; and by that time a letter came to Miss Gene—you see, it comes kind of natural to call her that just as I used to do, even if she is Brenny's wife—a letter had come from her dad, and it not only told her that everything would be all right before long, but it also contained an appointment for Paul as manager of Eighty-three.

"Well, Nick, there was high jinks for a time when that letter came. Miss Gene was sure pleased and Paul, well he didn't say much, but he took to grinning at things all of a sudden just as if the world had begun to please him aplenty. I reckon, maybe, it was because the appointment as manager made him see his way clear of making a good living for his wife and kid."

The cow-puncher made so long a pause that Nick exclaimed:

"Why don't you go on, Hartly?"

"Oh, I was just getting what the minister calls his

*See No. 613 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Senator's Plot."

data together," was the grinning reply. "I was sort of sizing up the past, trying to put things down in order."

"Well, go on, then!"

"All right. Brenny got well good and plenty soon after that, and he was riding the range along with the men before any other chap with the same kind of wounds he had, would have been out of his bed.

"Then comes along another letter from the old Senator gazabo in which he summons Paul and Gene and the kid to Washington to have a smoke-talk with him, and yours truly was appointed acting manager in their absence."

"That ought to have been a good thing for you, Dick?"

"It was as long as I kept it."

"Why didn't you hang onto it?"

"I was coming to that, Nick. You see it was this way: While Paul and Gene and the kid was in Washington, the old man up and gives him—makes a plumb present of it to him—the T-Bar-R over in Missoula County, Montana, together with all the range lands lying thereabout and the appurtenances pertaining thereto, as the saying goes.

"And now what do you suppose Brennan does? He up and writes me a letter in which he tells me about T-Bar-R and he makes just dog-gone fool enough of himself to let on that he'd mightily like to have me and Con come up there with him punching cows and herding horses, for he said he was going to run both kinds on his range.

"But he also says in the same letter that if we want to stay where we're at in New Mex., the old man was willing to appoint me manager and Con as the assistant.

"But, Nick, there wasn't anything doing; not a little bit, 'cause, you see, when Con and me got a-talking about Paul and Gene and little kid Dal, he couldn't aheld us two at Eighty-three, not if the Senator gazabo had given us the whole State of New Mexico to preside over. Maybe, Nick, that answers the question you asked?"

"I think it does," said the detective, laughing heartily.

CHAPTER II.

THE COW-PUNCHER'S STORY.

"Go on with your story," said the detective.

"Well, I always reckoned that Brenny was some pleased when he heard our decision, and I had a sneaking idea that he concluded what we were up to do when he seen the letter. And so, you see, when he got to the T-Bar-R outfit over in Missoula, Con and me were already there on the job. Of course, Nick, if we'd a' stayed in New Mex. I'd a' been manager and Con would a' been my assistant; while up in Missoula, we weren't any more than any other cow-puncher on the ranch; but then, you see, we had Gene to look at when we wanted to see something pretty and little Dal to play with and talk to until we wouldn't 'a swapped places with any manager between the Canada line and the Rio Grande.

"Everything went along smooth and pleasant as a moonlight night after that. All through that winter and plumb up to the middle of summer just past."

"Wait a moment," said the detective.

"Well, I'm waiting. What is it, Nick?"

"Don't you think you'd better put in a word or two about Tom Morgan just 'bout there, Dick?"

"Maybe so, although I was leaving him till I got to him rightly. However, if you want to hear the particulars about him, I'll give it to you straight."

"Yes, tell me all you know about him up to the time you left Eighty-three."

"It ain't much, Nick. It's mighty little, in fact, but such as it is, it's this."

"Well?"

"Hadn't we better go back to the time when Con and me left you that night on the plain to take him to Largo?"

"Yes."

"We sure took him there all right and took him a-running, too; and you can say for him that he wasn't any too plumb comfortable with his feet tied under the horse's belly with a rawhide riata. But when we got to Largo we found the sheriff and delivered Mr. Thomas Morgan into his hands; and I says to the sheriff: Here's a galoot that's a murderer and a hawss-thief and everything else that's bad, while all the time he's been posing as a sort of a cross between a church deacon and a Sunday-school teacher, and now that he's up and shot and almost murdered Paul Brennan, Mr. Nick Carter sends him to you with his compliments and asks you to please hold him till he comes, if you have to chain him.

"Well, the sheriff took him all right, and Con and me lit out for the Indian village, 'thout loitering any on the way.

"We were some disgusted when we got there and found that you was hiking back for the East right off,

and we was all a little on our ears when Brenny swore that he'd never appear against the man.

"As you know, Nick, the sheriff turned him loose soon after that, and you can take my word for it that Morgan had gone plumb loco when he got back to the ranch.

"The first thing he done when he got back was to chuck the wife out of doors without stopping to open the window, which I consider would have been only polite for him to do, and then being not quite satisfied with that, he sent his two kids after her by the same route and chased them with all the furniture and crockery there was in the house. After that he waltzed over to the bunk-house and tried to play up rough with the boys, and I reckon there'd 'a' been a shooting-match out of it if Con hadn't fetched him a clip under the ear with the butt of a quirt that was a-lying close by.

"He came to after we'd pretty near drowned him with water, and then was told quite some polite and considerate that if he ever showed his face again in the vicinity of Eighty-three, he'd be buried there with mighty little ceremony, although it might sound like a Fourth of July celebration. He lit out after that and the next day, but one, the outfit made up a purse for his wife and kids and they went back East to their old home."

"Didn't you see Morgan after that?" asked Nick.

"No, I never saw him after that, but I heard about him."

"What did you hear about him?"

"I heard he was first in one place and then in another raising Cain in all of them, and using that mighty strength—and he was some strong, as you will remember—knocking people about and breaking things generally. You see, Nick, it was pretty generally understood that his was loco and there was some talk in that part of the State of putting him away in some sort of asylum when he drifted out of sight, sound, and hearing and everything else just as sudden as you could pinch out the lighted end of a cigarette between your thumb and finger."

"Well," said Nick, "what more?"

"There ain't nothing more until Con and me came to Missoula."

"All right, go on with your story where you left off a moment ago."

"As I was saying, everything went along smooth as grease until up to the middle of summer, and then one evening just as the Chinese cook was serving chuck, who should pull in through the door of the cook-house but Tom Morgan himself."

"He had his nerve with him, didn't he?" asked Con Meyer, thus putting a word into the conversation for the first time.

"Yes," agreed Nick Carter. "Go on, Hartly!"

"Con and me spied him first, because we happened to be seated so we was facing the doorway, and you can search me as to which of us got across the table first. I think, however, that we both arrived about the same time, and before Tom Morgan knew what he was up against we had faced him right-about and had him a-running and jumping down the trail while we took turns fanning his coat-tails, if he'd 'a' had any, with our boot-toes.

"He didn't show up none after that—that is to say, he didn't materialize anywhere around the ranch-buildings, but we heard of him now and then first from one outfit and then another in that neighborhood, and finally it came to us that he'd got a job as hawss-wrangler over at the Rocking Chair, which is about sixty miles away from where we were located.

"But he didn't stay there long, for it wasn't more than a month after he first showed up in our region when we heard he had taken to the mountains and that he had got around him an outfit of a half-dozen men and they were rustling cattle and driving off horses to beat the band.

"Well, to go back a little, I had a talk with Brenny the day following his first appearance, and I told Brenny that if I was him I'd be mighty particular about keeping an eye on Gene and little Dal as long as Tom Morgan was in the neighborhood."

"You say that was about midsummer?" asked Nick.

"Yes, thereabouts."

"And how long ago was it that you heard that Morgan had bunched with a lot of cattle-rustlers and gone to the mountains?"

"Well, that was somewhere about the latter part of August, I reckon. And it was the last day of August when Morgan made his great play and got away with Paul and Gene and the kid in one swoop."

"Tell me how that happened," said the detective.

"That's the puzzle of it, Nick. Nobody knows how it did happen."

"Well, tell me what you know about it."

"You see, as near as I can make it out it was this way: Ever since I had that talk with Paul after Morgan showed up in that neighborhood, he'd been mighty particular about leaving Gene and little Dal ride any-

where alone, for the kid had a pony of his own that was just his fit, and mighty near as cute, too.

"They didn't appear to like it none being shut up the way they was, and so after a little Paul took to riding with them most every night just before sundown, and sometimes they didn't get back till the edge of the evening, and two or three times it was after dark when they did come.

"And then, Nick, there was one night when they didn't come back at all. We didn't notice it first, until it was an hour or two after they should have been there that we got some uneasy.

"And that's how they disappeared."

CHAPTER III.

PRISONERS IN THE MOUNTAINS.

"Didn't you make any effort to find them?" knowing well what the answer would be when he put the question.

"Didn't we? Well, I should say we did, and then some. We took the trail that same night, and came to a place in a coulée where they had stopped a minute to water their horses and where the ground was some torn up to indicate that there had been trouble while they was there. But we couldn't do anything in the darkness."

"I suppose you waited there until morning?" said the detective.

"Bet your life we just camped right there and waited till sunup."

"And discovered that they had been attacked?"

"Sure thing, Nick. We found the tracks made by seven horses, two of them shod, which ain't common in this neighborhood, as you will allow; and them horses had plumb surrounded Paul and Gene and little Dal apparently while they was engaged in watering their mounts, and as near as I could make out it had been a case of hands up or get plugged right then and there instantaneous."

"Didn't they leave a trail behind them from there?"

"Didn't they! I should say they did. That's why I'm here. Con and me have stuck to that trail ever since. Sometimes we've lost it for a day or two at a time, and sometimes not so long, but we've always succeeded in picking it up again, and it has brought us through places where you'd never think a horse could travel unless you'd ridden one over it yourself."

"Tell me about it," said Nick.

"Well, that trail took us across the Quartz and finally passed the edge of Flathead Forest into Oregon Gulch Creek. We followed along the bank of that for fifteen miles or more and into a cañon which is known as Dead Man's Pass, and I ain't none surprised that it got that name. From that on, Nick, we went up and up them mountains zigzagging through passages and sometimes climbing like goats until we crossed the range into Idaho and finally came out after days and days of travel on the south fork of the St. Joseph River, and from there I couldn't tell you exactly how we finally got here."

"I am not very clear as to just where we are now," said the detective.

"Well, I don't know as that's any surprise, seeing as how you're more used to city streets than you are to rocky regions like this; but you're at the present moment seated at a camp-fire that's built about halfway between Pot Mountain and one of the tallest peaks of this part of the Bitter Root Range of the Rockies."

"And do you mean to tell me?" asked the detective, "that we are at the present moment camped on the trail that you and Con have followed all the way from Missoula County, Montana?"

"That's what."

"But, Dick, have you any idea that Morgan and his men with their captives are anywhere near us now?"

"Have I any idea about it? Well, I should say I had. It ain't twelve hours' ride now since I saw the whole bunch of them."

"Saw them!" exclaimed Nick, staring and leaning forward.

"That's what, Nick; you bet your life I saw them."

"But where did you see them?"

"Back there in the mountains about ten miles from where we're seated right now."

"How long a time have you known that they were there?"

"I've knowed it ever since I sent you that letter, which was just a day more than two weeks ago."

"Then why in the world, Dick, instead of sending for me and waiting until I got here, didn't you send Con after the Sheriff at Wallace and have him come down here with a posse of men?"

"Hold hard, there, Nick; you ain't wise to the proposition, quite yet."

"Perhaps not, Dick."

"You see, Nick, it's this way: There ain't no posse of men nor no regiment of men nor any hull army of men that could drive those seven chaps out of the place

where they're staying. There ain't no force in the world that I ever saw or heard of that could get within shooting distance of them without being discovered, and if they was discovered, they could be picked off with a Winchester just as rapid as they showed up, for I'm telling you now that they couldn't get next to the place nohow more than one at a time."

"I begin to understand you," said the detective.

"That's what. Force ain't no good in this instance. It's strategy we want."

The detective nodded.

"It's strategy we want, Nick," repeated Hartly, "and when I turned the matter over some in my mind I just nacherly figured it out that you was the man we wanted."

"Of course," said the detective, "it's impossible for me to tell now from what little I have heard, and having seen nothing at all, what it may be possible to do."

"Of course."

"You say you saw them yesterday, Dick?"

"That's what."

"Tell me when and where. Tell me all about it."

"I can't very well tell you all about it, because I ain't got the power to describe it as it ought to be done, but I'll show you to-morrow what I saw to-day."

"When you told me you saw the whole bunch, did you mean that you also saw Paul Brennan and his wife?"

"I sure did; and the kid, too."

"In that case there is one thing upon which we are to be congratulated, for we have proof of your own eyesight that they are alive and well."

"Oh, I've got the proof that they're alive all right, but as for well——" He paused significantly.

"What do you mean by that ambiguous statement?" asked the detective.

"I mean this, Nick: When I tell you that them three was picketed out in the open down there at the bottom of that queer little valley in the mountains—when I tell you that they was picketed just like so many horses, and just far enough from one another so that they couldn't talk together without shouting, you'll allow they ain't as comfortable and well as they might be."

"Do you mean, Dick, do you mean it literally that they are all picketed out in that manner?"

"That's what I mean. My eyesight is pretty keen and sharp, Nick, although if I'd 'a' had some of them two eye-glasses that the tourists use, maybe I'd 'a' seen more than I did."

"But tell me the particulars of what you did see."

"Well, I made out that Paul is got one end of a horse-hide lariat tied around one ankle and that the other end of it is fastened to a stake that is driven into the earth. It looked to me, too, as if he had his hands tied behind him, although I couldn't see well enough at that distance to make it out good and proper."

"But Paul Brennan would have to have something more substantial than a mere leather thong and a wooden stake into the ground to hold him," said the detective.

"I ain't so sure of that," he said. "Rawhide lariats are tough things. Horses and steers don't break them, as you know, and then besides if a stake is long enough and big enough and is driven into the ground deep enough and hard enough, it ain't likely that Paul Brennan or you or me or all of us boys together could pull it out."

"And was Mrs. Brennan tied in the same manner?"

"As near as I could make it out, Nick, she was."

"Also with her hands tied behind her?"

"That's what."

"And the little boy?"

"Just ditto."

"What!" cried Nick. "You don't mean to tell me that those fiends are cruel enough to treat in that manner a little boy who is only four years old?"

Hartly started to his feet and took a turn up and down in front of the fire before he answered, and when he did so, it was in a voice that was guttural and harsh with the passion of it.

"What them fiends are a-doing now to Paul and Gene and the little kid won't be a circumstance to what I'll hand out to them when I get them once where I can do it," he said, and snapped his jaws together angrily as he did so.

CHAPTER IV.

MORGAN'S THREE VICTIMS.

It was not long after that when the detective and his two companions rolled themselves into blankets and composed themselves to sleep for the night; but they were astir quite early, in fact as soon as daylight came, for Nick Carter had announced that they must utilize every moment of light on the following day to follow out their campaign looking to the rescue of the prisoners in the mountains.

Hartly, with the skill of an old plainsman, had selected an excellent place for their camp.

It was, as has been stated, in the cañon that passes

between Pot Mountain and the Bitter Root Range. And it was located in a sort of L of this cañon which stretched off at right angles at one side for a distance of a quarter of a mile, and ended in a cul-de-sac.

This smaller cañon was shaped like a gorge, the larger end being at the extremity of it in the mountains, and this was a grassy plain, affording plenty of feed for the horses; and because it was also well watered it was an ideal spot in which to leave them.

Dawn was just breaking when the three men started out on their day's trip, for Hartly had already informed the detective that they had a walk of ten miles, most of it being sheer climbing along the mountainside, before they would arrive at the point they sought.

When Nick urged him to make an earlier start, he replied by the statement that it would be impossible to do so, owing to the difficulties of travel.

"We couldn't reach the place nohow without daylight to help us," he insisted. "If you try to go along any of them passes in the dark, you'd have to be seven different kinds of a goat to keep from falling into the gulch."

It seemed to Nick that they went up and up for many miles. There were times when they made their way around the sheer sides of the mountain with their backs pressed tightly against the rocky walls, while beneath them was a gulf where it would be certain death to fall, and on the other hand the smooth face of the cliff extended upward seemingly to the sky itself. At other times they passed along the edges of precipices and again ascended along the bed of some mountain brook where, for a little distance, the way was easy enough to travel.

At last—and it was almost noon when they arrived there, Hartly led the way into a narrow cañon which seemed as if it were a cliff in the mountain itself, made by some huge implement like an ax; just inside of it he paused and turned, saying as he did so:

"We are almost there now, Nick. We'll arrive in about ten minutes more; and then I'll show you what I described to you last night."

Ten minutes later the detective found himself standing upon the ledge of rocks overlooking a valley of broad expanse which must have contained almost a square mile of territory.

The bottom of this valley suggested an El Dorado to the detective.

It was as smooth and even almost as the lawn of a gentleman's country residence; it was dotted here and there with small groves of trees; a brook ran across it almost diagonally from corner to corner, and a pond that was three or four acres in area reposed placidly almost in the center of the valley.

At one side of this pond and fronting upon it there was a house built of a strange mixture of logs and stones. And off to the right of it, a few rods away, were three small stone huts, while before the door of each one of these—if a mere opening in a dog-kennel could be dignified by the name of a door, a human being was seated.

Hartly raised his arm and pointed silently toward them, and Nick Carter, following the direction indicated, immediately understood all that Hartly had attempted to describe during their talk the preceding evening.

The three persons seated before the stone kennels, for they could scarcely be called huts, were Paul Brennan, Gene, and little Dallas.

The huts were located so that they faced one another in a sort of triangle and were, Nick thought, separated each from the others by approximately two hundred feet.

This then was the way in which Tom Morgan, ex-manager of Ranch Eighty-three, was wreaking vengeance on the people he thought had somehow wronged him.

Even as Nick Carter looked upon the scene, Brennan rose from his seat in front of the kennel and started forward to the end of the tether that held him, and Nick could see even at that distance that Brennan's hands were tied behind his back, although they were not bound so closely together that he could not move them separately. Nevertheless, he could not get them in front of him.

As if before he left his place in front of the kennel and started forward Paul had called to his wife to do likewise, she also rose and moved and went away from her kennel and little Dal also, and so the three stood facing each other perhaps fifty feet apart, each tethered as has already been described by a rope of some kind to stakes that were driven into the ground near their respective kennellike habitations.

For a moment the impulse was on the detective to fire his revolver into the air in order to reassure those poor prisoners that help was at hand, and that their friends had not forgotten them; but as if Hartly guessed what was in the detective's mind, he reached out a restraining hand and touched him on the arm.

"I thought of that myself, Nick, when first I came to this place and I was mighty near doing it, too, but when I came to think it over I knew it wasn't best."

"I wish I could find some way of letting them know

that we're near at hand," said Nick, scowling in the anxiety he felt.

"So do I, Nick, you bet your life I do; but don't you see that if we was to try to let them know that we're here, we'd only end by telling Morgan of it, too? And don't you realize that if we did that, it would go a heap harder for Paul and Gene and the kid?"

"I suppose it would," admitted the detective.

"I am not so sure, Nick, but what that fiend would murder them outright if he had any idea we'd trailed them this far, but you see that their camp in the mountains, where they're located now, is hidden away so plumb secure that I don't suppose that Morgan thinks he ever will be found."

"Perhaps not."

"He's a nice, sweet, gentle kind of a galoot to have for an enemy, ain't he?"

"I would like to have him within reach of my right arm," replied the detective.

"Oh, we'll have him there all right," said Hartly.

"How did they get down into that valley, Dick?" asked the detective.

For reply Hartly raised his right arm and pointed across the valley toward the opposite side of it, indicating a narrow fissure in the rocks not unlike the one where they were standing until it dug deeper into the mountainside, descending in the form of a letter V until it almost reached the bottom.

"Is that the place?" asked the detective.

"Yes, that's the place."

"How did they get down into it through that fissure?"

"There's a zigzag path that leads down into the rocks, and there are places along there that are cut into steps. There couldn't more than one man go down it at a time, and he'd have to go mighty slow and careful to get to the bottom of it without falling."

"Is there no other way into the valley?"

"None that I have been able to find."

"Have you searched, Hartly?"

"I have been plumb around the place half a dozen times since I have been here."

"Don't the men who are in there have to come out to get provisions?"

Hartly shrugged his shoulders.

"If any of them has been out of that place since I trailed them here, I don't know it," he replied. "I've kept as good a watch as I could, and I've been here every blessed day as soon as I could make the trip after sunup, and I've stayed just as long as I could so as to get back to camp before dark, and I ain't seen one of 'em try to leave the place, or one come into it after having been out."

"But they must have provisions, and to have them they must go out to get them," remonstrated the detective.

"I reckon, Nick, that they're stocked up and that they don't need to do any foraging."

He raised his hand again and pointed down the valley in the direction in which the detective had not looked as yet, and there they discovered several head of cattle, a half-dozen horses, and as many sheep browsing upon the grass.

To the utter amazement of both Dick Hartly and Con Meyer, Nick Carter burst into a sudden laughter, although he was particular that it should not be loud enough for the sound of it to carry into the valley.

"What's the matter with you, now?" asked Hartly.

"I was laughing at you, Dick," was the reply.

"Well, maybe I'm plumb ludicrous in my appearance, but I reckon you ought to 'a' got used to it by this time."

"It isn't your appearance that I'm laughing at," said the detective.

"Maybe it's my language then?"

"No, Dick, it isn't your appearance nor yet your language. It's your downright stupidity."

"Would you mind setting that statement to music so that I could understand it, Nick?"

For reply, and still smiling, the detective pointed to the horses and cattle and sheep browsing in the valley. Then he asked:

"Do you know what those things are, Dick?"

"I sure do."

"Well, what?"

"Horses and cows and sheep."

"Right, Dick; but are you sure, Dick, they haven't got wings?"

"Aw, take a cinch on yourself; what's the matter with you?"

"I was about to ask you, Dick, how do you suppose the horses and cows and sheep found their way into that valley without wings, always provided that there is no other way into it than the one you have already described to me."

For a moment Hartly stared at the detective without replying, but with his mouth widely open in amazement because of his own stupidity. Then he slapped his thigh with a resounding whack as he exclaimed:

"I sure was plumb loco that I never thought of that."

CHAPTER V.

IN THE POWER OF A MADMAN.

When the detective turned his eyes back again toward the house that has already been described as standing near the border of the little lake, he saw a tall and rugged figure come out from it, and in this man he instantly recognized Tom Morgan, the ex-manager of Eighty-three.

The distance was too great for the detective and his companions to have heard any word that was uttered unless it had been shouted almost at the top of a voice, but it is remarkable how keen one may become in reading pantomime in such an instance as then existed.

When Morgan left the door of the house, he paused long enough to light his pipe, and then stalked slowly and almost with a military tread toward the spot where Paul Brennan was tethered, much as if he had been an unruly animal.

The three prisoners saw him approaching, and ceased speaking with each other to turn toward their jailer, and even at that distance Nick Carter could see that Gene and the child both shrank backward as if suddenly possessed of overwhelming fear. It was a strange kind of fear, too, Nick Carter thought, since they did not turn and run away, but withdrew slowly backward, each of them keeping their faces toward Morgan and each moving with a slow precision that suggested to the detective that they were endeavoring to retreat without giving their captor the idea that they did so.

Morgan seemed not to notice Gene or Dallas, but walked deliberately until he stood a few paces from Brennan, then paused and folded his arms across his breast.

At that distance it looked as if the two men were regarding each other in silence, for neither of them made a gesture of any sort and no sound whatever came to the three watchers who were concealed far up on the side of the mountain.

This act continued for several moments and was brought to a close by Morgan turning away deliberately and walking toward the hut into which Brennan's wife had disappeared, while the boy had already gone out of sight in the other one.

It was evident that Morgan spoke sharply to her, however, when he was near enough, for Nick saw her step outside and confront the man as her husband had done, with folded arms and with the air of a prisoner who is prepared to be calmly receptive of whatever cruelty and whatever inhumanity may be visited upon one.

Here there was another interval precisely like the first one and which lasted about the same length of time; and after it Morgan calmly turned his back upon the woman, facing toward the hut where Dallas was, and it seemed to Nick as if the man were contemplating a like visit to the child.

However, he seemed to think better of it, for presently, with the first gesture he had made since the strange interview began, he flung out his arms, turned on his heel and, with his hands clasped behind him, walked swiftly back to the house from whence he had come.

It is only fair to our readers to tell here what Morgan said to Brennan, the knowledge came to Nick Carter very soon afterward; and could he have known at that time all that he afterward discovered, it is likely that he would have taken the rifle which Hartly carried and shot the ex-manager down then and there.

But he did not know and he could not know.

The attitude of Brennan during the interview had been such as to give him no idea of what was said or to even suggest to him the awfulness of the tragery with which the ex-manager of Eighty-three threatened his prisoner.

But the fact of the matter was that when Morgan strode forth and stopped in front of Paul Brennan, he asked him with a leer in his eyes:

"Brennan, how long do you think you could live without anything to eat or drink?" and Brennan had replied as calmly as if the question related to some trivial matter:

"Oh, as long as any other man, I imagine."

"Well, I'm going to feed you up to-day with all you can eat, and if you'll take my advice you'll fill your stomach plumb full of the grub I shall lay out for you, because it will be the last you'll ever get."

"Do you mean to starve us?" asked Brennan, with difficulty repressing an exclamation of startled horror.

"That's what," was the reply. "That is, I mean to starve *you*."

The significance of this expression was perfectly understood, and although Brennan made no motion and said no word to indicate that he was aware of it, he nevertheless was so; but he had his own reasons for conducting himself as he did.

Morgan was insane.

He had become entirely a madman, and Paul Brennan had already been his prisoner long enough to discover that the only way in which to avoid violence

from him was to remain entirely passive and to accept whatever the man said or did without showing any emotion whatever.

In this he had cautioned his wife and child, and as young and small as the boy was, the adversities through which he had already passed during his young life had rendered him much older and had given him much more understanding than his years could have suggested.

During all this time, as we know, Nick Carter watched the pantomimic scene from the ledge of rocks where he and his companions were hidden from view.

The reader must understand that Nick Carter, thus far in the present case, had only the information that Hartly had given him to go upon, and he supposed that there were at least six other men besides Morgan in the valley with the prisoners.

How mistaken he was in this conjecture, we will presently see.

When Morgan returned to the house he disappeared inside of it, and then as hour after hour passed and he did not reappear, Nick Carter began to marvel that there were no more signs of activity about the place and that he saw nothing whatever of the men who were supposed to be there as companions and followers of Morgan.

It is true that Hartly had already indicated in his talks with the detective that Morgan was crazy, but it is also true that this statement had made so little impression upon the detective that he had not considered it seriously.

He regarded the ex-manager just as he had known him in the past; as a brutal, relentless sort of a giant who had been born without compassion and whose nature was utterly selfish and entirely cruel.

That the man was actually mad, had become as crazed, indeed, as any maniac who was ever confined in a straight-jacket, never occurred to Nick Carter.

The incidents that Hartly had related to him about Morgan throwing his wife and children and furniture out of doors were, so far as the detective was concerned, merely in keeping with the man's character, and he really had no idea that Paul and Gene and Dallas Brennan were tethered down there in that rock-bound valley as prisoners of a man who was literally and wholly insane.

Still less had he any idea that Morgan had already rid himself of his followers so that he alone remained as keeper over his charges.

Had the detective but been aware of that fact; had he but known that Morgan alone was jailer there and that there was no men within reach of him, or indeed anywhere in the world, who would go to his assistance, Nick Carter might have acted very differently from what he did that day.

A bullet from the Winchester carried by Dick Hartly would have disabled him so that Nick and his two companions might easily have descended to the valley without hindrance of any kind.

But Nick and Hartly and Con Meyer all the time supposed that there were six other outlaws inside the house who could easily be aroused and who doubtless were armed with Winchesters and prepared to repel any attack that might be made upon their strangely located stronghold.

It was a long time after the scene just described had occurred when Meyer, who was lying face down upon the ledge close beside Nick Carter, remarked:

"Where do you suppose the rest of the bunch can be?" and it was Hartly who replied:

"I reckon, Con, that they're sleeping off last night's drunk and card-playing, for that's about all they have to do in that there happy valley."

"It seems to me sort of strange that they don't show up none," continued Meyer, after another pause for meditative reflection.

"They're just like all other wild beasts," said Hartly. "They sleep by day and prowl by night. Every day I've been here looking down into the valley I ain't seen none of them only the first two or three times I came."

"But you saw them then?" asked Nick.

"Oh, yes; I saw them two or three or maybe four times."

"All of them?"

"I reckon so."

"You say there were seven?"

"Seven all told; counting Morgan."

"You have no reason to believe that any of them have gone away, have you?"

"Yonder is their horses," replied Hartly, pointing toward the animals browsing in the valley.

"I reckon that if they'd gone away anywhere, they'd 'a' sure used their cayuses, for it stands to reason, don't it, that if they could get them into the valley they could also get them out of it?"

Nick nodded.

He was impressed by the suggestions in this conversation, although he could not have told exactly why; but it did occur to him as strange that barring the first two or three or four visits Hartly had made

to that ledge he had seen none of the men who were the reputed followers of the ex-manager.

If the truth of the circumstances occurred to Nick Carter then, the suggestion in his mind was so vague and indistinct as to leave no definite impression upon it, and so the three men watched on and on together, for the most part in silence, but with an occasional interchange of confidences such as has already been described.

When the day lengthened into afternoon and the hour approached when they must leave that spot if they intended to return to their camp before darkness prevented, Nick quietly announced to his companions:

"Dick, I want you and Con to go back to the camp to-night without me."

"You ain't going to stay here alone, are you, Nick?" was the reply.

"Yes," replied the detective.

"But what for? You can't do anything."

"On the contrary," smiled the detective, "I think I can do a great deal."

"I'd like to know what."

"Well, at least I will accomplish two things by remaining."

"Would you mind telling me what they are?"

"I will have a chance to observe closely what goes on here during the hours of evening and the darkness of night that follows, and I will be here very early in the morning so that I can use the first hours of daylight for whatever I decide upon doing, and besides, Dick, I want to see those six companions of Morgan's with my own eyes."

"Maybe they won't show up, Nick."

"They can't remain inside of that house forever, Hartly, and if they're there, I'll see them before the dawn of another day; and moreover, by the time you and Con arrive back here to-morrow, I will have made a pretty thorough investigation of this neighborhood."

There was more argument after that, but it was finally closed by Nick Carter having his way, as he always did. And so presently he was left alone on the ledge on the mountainside to watch over the three prisoners so unhappily imprisoned in the valley beneath him.

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER TO THE RESCUE.

During the time that Nick Carter had been peering over the ledge upon which he and his companions had been concealed before the departure of Hartly and Meyer, he had noticed that far beneath him on the same precipice there were places where a foothold might be secured, although each one appeared to be extremely precarious from the height from which he viewed them.

In one of the conversations before referred to, he had called Hartly's attention to this fact, and the latter had nodded and replied:

"Yes, Nick, I saw those places the first time I came here, and seeing as how I reckoned then that maybe it would be the only means I could discover of getting down into the valley in case I had to do it alone, I packed a couple of ropes from the camp next time I came. They're hidden over there behind that rock where you can easily reach them with your hand in case you want them. But I didn't use them, Nick, because I found the other way into the valley, and then I figured it out as there was no sign of immediate harm coming to the prisoners, I'd wait until you got here."

As the evening advanced and everything remained quiet below him, Nick remembered what Hartly had said to him about the rope, and when darkness had finally fallen, an irrepressible desire to descend into the valley came over the detective.

He wished now that he had made his preparations to do so before dark, for the smaller projections of rock below him upon which he had thought to obtain a foothold if he should undertake such a descent, were now hidden from view.

Nevertheless, he studied upon the matter while he watched the house and its surroundings.

As evening deepened, a light glowed through the door of the house into which Morgan had disappeared, and from which he had not come forth since that strange interview with his captives.

Over at the little huts where the prisoners were confined by tethers there was no sign of life whatever; at least there was none which the detective could observe.

Had he but known it, however, or had he been able to see understandingly through the darkness, he would have discovered that Paul Brennan and Gene and Dallas were seated upon the grass, each one at the end of the ropes that held them, and that they were conversing earnestly together in low tones.

Once as the night deepened, Nick saw Morgan come out upon the steps in front of the house, and stand there where the light shone upon him from the light in the room.

But he went no farther than that, and presently returned inside and was lost to view again.

And so an hour and then another hour passed, until Nick Carter reasoned in his own mind that it must be past midnight.

Then it was that the impulse to descend into the valley came upon him again, and without stopping to reason upon the perils he would encounter in making the descent in the darkness, he possessed himself of the ropes Hartly had spoken about, and began looking about him in the darkness for a means of making the end of one of them fast, so that he could drop down from the edge of the precipice.

There were three of these ropes and each was about thirty feet in length. Two of these the detective fastened around his waist, while he tied one end of the third to a small tree which had somehow found root-hold in a crevice between the rocks and which was apparently strong and firm enough to sustain his weight.

In this rope, at irregular intervals, he tied knots so that if he should have occasion to climb back again or to stop and hang for a moment in the descent, he would have a better grasp upon it than the mere naked line would allow.

Just how long it took him to complete these preparations does not appear, but as he saw no further sign of life in the valley below save in the reflection of the light which still shone out through the doorway, he presently decided to make the effort, and to attempt in the darkness an act that would have been extremely hazardous even at midday.

Above him the stars twinkled brightly, and if one had been out upon an open plain, the night could not have been described as a dark one; but down beneath him everything appeared as black as can be imagined, and only for that point of light shining through the doorway as described, the valley looked like a dark hole in the earth.

If you will put yourself in his place, it is possible that you can imagine something of the sensations he felt when he swung out over the abyss, clinging to the knotted rope with ninety or a hundred feet of vacant space beneath him into a void which ended in masses of jagged rocks which from time to time during the flight of years had fallen over the face of the cliff into the valley below.

He descended until he was near the end of the rope which sustained him, and discovered, much to his consternation, that he could not reach the ledge he had counted upon, and he realized too late that he should have tied all three ropes together before he started, instead of wearing two of them around his waist.

The result of this first effort was that he was obliged to return again to the top of the ledge, and you can imagine that it was no easy task to do so, for the knots he had put in the ropes were separated by distances of three or four or five feet.

However, he presently did regain the ledge and then, after resting for a time to regain his breath and his composure, he tied the ropes together and began his second effort.

We need not detail the incidents of his second descent into the dark void beneath him more than to say that it consumed much time and patience and he was required to exert great strength because of the projecting rocks, many of them so loose that they crumbled beneath the touch of his feet, and others so jagged that he had to use his utmost efforts to avoid them, fearing lest their sharp edges would sever the rope, which was the only barrier between him and certain death.

But he had at last come to the last knot in the ropes he had tied together, and then to his consternation discovered that he was still swinging in space and without the slightest idea how much distance there still remained between himself and the bottom of the valley.

Now, there was only one way by which he could determine this fact, and he wound that part of the rope which still dangled beneath him around one of his arms so that he could cling to it with one hand, while with the other he reached into his pocket for the powerful electric torch which we who know him remember is always in his possession.

Hanging like a pendulum over the face of the cliff and swinging to and fro, he pointed the light downward and pressed upon the button, discovering as he did so that the space beneath him and the bottom was not above ten feet and that there was a comparatively smooth spot upon which he could alight when he dropped.

Then while he was still studying it and just as he was about to release the button and return the electric torch to his pocket, a startling thing happened.

The crack of a rifle sounded sharply on the night air and an instant thereafter Nick Carter's right hand suddenly went numb as if from a blow.

The first impression was that the bullet had struck him, but with the next instant he realized that it had only shattered his electric torch and knocked it from his hand.

Of course it was a chance shot and might never have been repeated, but nevertheless it was a narrow escape for the detective, and it told him two things: that the ex-manager of Eighty-three was on the watch, and that he had seen the sharp glare of the electric torch through the black darkness of the valley.

Almost instantly Nick released his hold upon the rope and dropped—and it was perhaps as well that he did so, for five other rifle-shots rang out in quick succession from the direction of the house in the valley, as if that many men had fired toward the spot where the light had been seen, or at least as if one man was pumping his Winchester diligently in that direction.

There was a breathing space of almost a minute after that, during which the silence was profound, and then five other shots rang out in quick succession, and Nick could hear the spatter of the bullets against the rocks around him.

Nothing dismayed save for the fact that he regretted that his presence there was discovered, he darted away to one side until he believed he was out of the range of the bullets and could not be seen; and that whoever it was who was firing at him had only the reflection of his electric torch—now extinguished forever as far as that particular implement was concerned—to go by.

Again there was a protracted silence, while Nick waited, wondering what it would be best for him to do next.

The silence continued for so long a time that he presently began to move swiftly though cautiously forward.

Just there near the base of the cliff, the ground was rough and uneven and was littered by rocks and stones and other débris that had fallen from the heights above.

Nick Carter's advance, therefore, because of the darkness, was both slow and laborious.

He could discern next to nothing; it was the sort of darkness which is usually described as the kind where one cannot see his hand before his face.

He had just begun to move forward again when he was startled into increased activity by a loud scream which echoed and reechoed again and again across that rock-bound valley, and which was so filled with terror that Nick Carter bounded forward with all the speed he could muster, unmindful of the cuts and bruises he received from the rocks among which he stumbled.

The screams were repeated again and again, and there were unintelligible exclamations in a masculine voice mingled with them.

It never occurred to Nick Carter then what odds he might encounter; he only knew that Gene Brennan and perhaps her child were in danger; and so as he rushed forward he fired one of his revolvers several times in the air, thinking that the mere reports of his weapon might so startle the man or men who were attacking her into flight or at least might draw their attention away from doing her immediate harm in order to prepare for their own protection.

CHAPTER VII.

A MADMAN'S FRENZIED ACT.

The light we have described issuing from the door of the house in which Morgan had disappeared in the afternoon was now extinguished, and there was absolutely nothing to tell the detective where to go or what to do save only the remembrance of those screams and shouts and his own masterful sense of direction.

As he advanced, however, the ground became smooth and even, and in much less time than it takes to tell it, he was running swiftly toward the place from which the cries had proceeded.

The actual distance from the base of the cliff, where he had dropped from the end of the dangling rope into the valley, to the place where the house and the three huts were located, was about the same as three city block or perhaps four; that is to say, between six and eight hundred feet.

Nick Carter had covered approximately two-thirds of the distance before he realized the significance of the fact that he had heard no further sounds of any kind, and that he might perhaps be running into an ambush quickly prepared for him after he had fired his own revolver several times as described.

The fact that he had heard no further screams or cries and that now profound silence seemed to reign over the valley, impressed him; it told him that either he was already too late to be of much service, or else that if he could be of any service at all, it must be accomplished with caution and deliberation. He stopped dead still and threw himself face downward on the sod, and as he laid prone upon the ground he became suddenly aware of the beating noise made by horses' hoofs, although it was impossible for him to determine from what direction they came.

Turning his head quickly he pressed his ear against

the earth, and he thought in the interval that followed, which could not have lasted more than two or three seconds before he raised his head again and leaped to his feet, that there were two or three horses galloping across that rock-bound plain.

Of one thing he was assured, however, and that was that the noises were sufficiently distant from him to give him all the assurance he needed that he was in no immediate danger himself of being ambushed; furthermore, he was convinced that the people in the valley no doubt believed they were attacked by superior numbers and were endeavoring to make their escape.

With sudden determination he bounded to his feet again and ran forward more swiftly than ever in the direction of the kennellike huts near which the prisoners were tethered.

Then, just as he did so, the third startling event of the night occurred, and so amazing was it, that for a moment Nick Carter stopped dead still in his tracks and stared.

There was an explosion directly ahead of him which shook the earth and which sent a spurt of fire high into the air, and in the flash of light that came with it, it seemed to Nick Carter as if the house in which Morgan had taken refuge leaped of its own volition into the air to fall again into a mass of wreckage and ruin.

But there was inflammable material enough to create a fire following upon the explosion, and as Nick Carter dashed forward again wondering what had happened to bring it about, the fire gained headway until by contrast with the intense darkness that had preceded it, objects were plainly discernible around him.

It gained headway swiftly, and by the time the detective had arrived close upon the scene, the glow of the fire had carved a hollow out of the darkness that reached around and embraced the three huts already described.

A mere glance toward them revealed no sign of the presence of any of the prisoners, but just then he heard a hoarse cry apparently from the midst of the débris of the wrecked house, and he saw in that instant the figure of Paul Brennan standing erect amid the flames which approached him all too closely, and he was holding tightly clasped in his arms the clinging form of his boy, Dallas.

Something akin to a miracle had spared Paul Brennan's life as well as his son's, for while the fire was all around them it had not touched them. There was an open space leading through it where the force of the explosion had scattered the débris. Had Nick Carter approached the house from any other direction than he did he could not have seen and would not have known how to fly at once to the rescue of the man and his child.

But now the way was open if he but acted quickly, and you may rest assured that he did that.

It was less than a minute later when he had cut the rope which held Brennan a prisoner and had dragged him forth out of reach of the flames to a safe distance from the wrecked and burning building.

There was a gash in Brennan's forehead where a piece of the flying stone had struck him as the result of the explosion, otherwise he was unharmed and the boy seemed entirely so; but no sooner had Nick Carter pulled them both out of danger than Paul Brennan fainted and fell over upon the grass as a result of the horror through which he had just passed.

Nick left the fainting man and the sobbing child where they were while he dashed back to the ruin again to search for Gene, whom he supposed for the moment had been left in the same predicament; but he was not long in discovering that she was not there. With a light hope in his heart that he might find her still a prisoner, bound to the tethered rope, he dashed from one to the other of the kennellike huts, but only to discover that they were all alike—vacant. And then he remembered the hoof-beats he had heard while his ear was pressed against the ground, and he realized in that instant all the devilish ingenuity of the ex-manager of Eighty-three in not only making his escape on horseback with Gene Brennan, but leaving Paul and the child to be killed by the explosion he had prepared and set off with a time fuse.

The one thing which Nick could not explain to himself was how the man had been enabled to accomplish it all so swiftly and so surely, for he believed that Morgan could have known nothing of his own approach to the valley and descent into it before he had seen the reflection of the electric torch against the rocks at the time we have already described.

In the meantime, while these thoughts were passing rapidly through his brain, he was working diligently over the senseless form of Brennan, and talking reassuringly to Dallas, whose sobs had now ceased and who was gazing wonderingly upon the face of the detective, whom he seemed vaguely to remember.

Nick made no effort to conceal himself or his movements, which were plainly revealed by the light of the fire, for he had leaped to the conclusion that no matter how many had been in or around that house when he approached it first, all had fled and left him in sole possession of the place.

In his ignorance of the facts he supposed this was due to the suddenness of his attack and to the alarm created by the firing of his revolver in the air.

Presently Paul Brennan opened his eyes and, when he had swallowed a little more of the brandy that Nick gave him, he recovered quickly and raised himself to a sitting posture, from which he presently sprang to his feet almost his old self again.

"Nick Carter!" he exclaimed, with utter amazement, for he could have no idea that the detective was nearer than two or three thousand miles from him.

"Never mind asking me questions, Paul," said Nick, interrupting him. "Tell me what has happened here. Begin at the moment when darkness came, for I know everything before that time."

"Do you know that Morgan is a madman?" asked Brennan.

"I know that he is the greatest villain unhung."

"Granted, Nick, but I do not mean that now. Do you know that he is crazy, absolutely crazy? That he is just a lunatic, no more or less?"

Nick made no answer in words, and Brennan continued:

"If you want to know only what happened since dark, I will tell you that. In the first place you must understand that Morgan is absolutely insane and that I have known it ever since we have been prisoners here. For that reason I have tried to accept everything that he has said or done with the outward appearance of calmness and passivity. Yesterday during the day he came to me and told me that he was going to starve me to death, then he crossed over to where Gene was a prisoner and informed her that he was going to starve Dallas and me. After that he disappeared into the house and we did not see him again until after dark. We were seated out there on the grass as near together as the ropes which held us would permit us to approach when Morgan suddenly appeared before us and gruffly ordered us each back to our respective huts. He paid no attention to Dallas or to Gene after that, but followed me and I was surprised to see that he had cut the rope that held me and was carrying the end of it in his grasp.

"At the point of a pistol he then compelled me to go before him to the house and there to an iron ring that is set in the door-step he tied and bound me just as you found me when you arrived.

"After that, Nick, he piled every rough article of furniture that the house contained into the room behind me, and over it he poured the contents of the lamps as well as all of the oil that was left in his supply can.

"After a while he came and stood before me, grinning horridly, while he exhibited two sticks of dynamite.

"I asked him what he intended to do, but he would not reply to me, and throughout the two or three hours which must have passed from the beginning of his making his arrangements until he completed them he did not utter one word.

"When all of his arrangements were completed he went away, and presently returned with Dallas, whom he tied, as you know, to the same iron ring where I was fastened, and my only gratification at the time was that I believed that he intended to spare Gene from the horrible death he meditated for Dallas and me."

"What happened after that, Paul?"

"I do not know much about it, for in my efforts to comfort Dallas, who was crying for his mother, I did not pay much attention to the flight of time, and I hoped all the while that something would occur to make Morgan forget what he had planned to do. It would not have been surprising if he had forgotten it, for since we have been prisoners here he has often commenced something of the kind, only to leave it undone.

"I had fallen into a reverie and Dallas was almost asleep in my arms when we were both startled and terrorized by hearing Gene scream and then——"

"I know the rest," said Nick, "perhaps better than you do."

CHAPTER VIII.

MORGAN DOUBLES ON THE TRAIL.

The first streaks of dawn made their appearance over the mountain-tops while Nick and Paul Brennan were discussing the strange adventures through which the latter had passed.

From the description given him by Brennan, Nick learned how Morgan and his followers had come suddenly upon him while he was out riding with his wife and child, and when they had stopped in the coulée, just as night was falling, to water their horses.

They had been surrounded, much as Hartly had described the incident to Nick, as the cow-puncher had been able to read the signs from the trail left upon the ground around the water-hole.

Paul described also in considerable detail the peril-

ous ride they had been compelled to take through the mountains, and he explained how Morgan had gotten rid of his men, one after another, until finally they entered the valley, where Nick Carter subsequently found them, with one of Morgan's original band of outlaws as a companion.

And then the second morning after their arrival there, Morgan had taken this man out of the valley with him and had returned alone; but whether the madman had murdered his accomplice or only sent him away, as he had done with the others, Brennan had no means of knowing.

The devilish ingenuity with which Morgan had confined his three prisoners was remarkable.

The rawhide ropes with which they had been tethered to the iron stakes in the plain, as has already been described, were so tough and strong that it was impossible to break them or even to gnaw them through with his teeth, as Brennan confessed he had several times attempted to do.

Brennan's hands had been fastened behind him, but the tying was done with small wires which, when the slightest strain was placed upon them, so cut into the flesh that Brennan had been unable to do anything whatever to free himself from his bonds.

And so he had been kept a prisoner tethered in front of his kennel like a fractious horse or an ugly dog, and he had been waited upon daily by the madman, who rarely addressed a word to him, and whose conduct throughout was indeed entirely inexplicable.

Save only for the inconvenience which had resulted to Gene from the confinement and discomforts of her captivity, Morgan had offered her no indignity whatever.

Why, now, he had chosen to take her away into captivity while leaving her husband and son to face death as described, could not and cannot be explained other than as the freak of an insane person whose acts, while amazingly cunning, are ever without definite purpose or logical reason.

With the first appearance of daylight, Nick Carter started to his feet and, pointing toward the cliff down which he had descended by aid of the ropes, he said to Brennan:

"Paul, that cliff over yonder is where I descended into the valley last night. Some time during the forenoon, Dick Hartly and Con Meyer will appear there, not at the top of the cliff, but at the bottom of the fissure which descends through it one-third of the distance down."

"Yes?" asked Brennan, wondering what was coming next.

"I am going to take Morgan's trail and follow it. Had I known yesterday that he was here alone with you, I could have broken one of his legs with a rifle-ball and we might have rescued you all then and there."

"But you did not know it," said Brennan.

"No; Hartly was so certain that there was a gang of outlaws here with Morgan that I dreaded to have our presence discovered lest it result seriously for you and your wife and child, but now I must take the trail of Morgan at once."

Brennan nodded his head. He knew perfectly well that it would be impossible for him to accompany Nick Carter, for the double reason that little Dallas could not stand the rigors of such a journey and that some one must remain behind to await the arrival of Hartly and Meyer.

"There are horses out there on the plain," said Nick, "and by making a lariat of these ropes, which have been used to picket you out here, I should be able to catch one of them. Perhaps, Paul, you can tell me the way out of this place on horseback?"

For reply Brennan pointed across the valley and said:

"Over yonder in about the direction in which I am pointing there is a tunnel through the mountain which gives out upon a cañon after you have traveled through the space in utter darkness for half a mile or more."

"A tunnel!" exclaimed Nick.

"Well, it is not exactly a tunnel. It was originally a gorge through the mountains, but some convulsion of nature has tumbled the cliffs together so that they have formed what appears to be a tunnel fashioned by the hand of man."

"It is enough," said Nick. "I will follow it, and you, Paul, must go over near the cliff where I descended into the valley and wait there for the arrival of Hartly and Meyer. When they come and have found their way into the valley with you, I would advise that all of you take the trail I leave behind me, and which I shall make plain enough for you to follow without difficulty."

But Nick was destined to be disappointed in his expectation of finding the horses.

The cunning of the madman had not deserted him when he made his escape from the valley, for he had been wise enough to drive out ahead of him every horse that he could not use, and the consequence was

that there was no mount left for Nick Carter to make use of.

He found the tunnellike grotto, however, that Brennan had described to him, and he had no difficulty whatever in passing through it on foot, save that for a considerable part of the distance the darkness was so intense that he had almost to feel his way, since he had neglected to provide himself with any sort of light for the purpose.

The trail gave out presently upon a deep cañon and led along the side of it by a winding route, sometimes ascending, but oftener descending until at last, several miles away, he came down to the bed of it and paused there in doubt as to which way to turn, for the floor of the cañon was of rock and the horses had left no trail.

There were mosses growing everywhere about, however, and the detective was not long in discovering where chunks of this had been knocked aside, showing evidences where it had been disturbed lately and leading down into the cañon.

He had followed this trail perhaps two miles farther when he was suddenly startled by hearing his name called seemingly from the midst of a grove of stunted cedars which had somehow found foothold upon a wide ledge of the cañon, the surface of which was perhaps twenty feet above the bed of it. Raising his eyes instantly, he was more amazed than by anything that had ever happened in his experiences to see Gene Brennan standing almost at the edge of the small plateau and gesticulating to him as definitely as she could do with her head, for her hands seemed to be bound behind her.

You can well imagine that it did not take the detective long to reach her side, and to release her from the ingenious contrivance that Morgan had used in each case to bind his victims and render them helpless.

She did not fall weeping into his arms and she did not faint, but her eyes were wide and frightened nevertheless as she exclaimed, without preamble and without expressing surprise:

"Oh, let us hurry back as quickly as we can."

"Where is Morgan?" demanded Nick, who was already looking eagerly around him, for he expected at each instant to see the madman appear.

"He has gone back," she replied.

"Gone back where?" asked Nick.

"To the valley."

"But that is impossible, Mrs. Brennan. If he had attempted to do that I must have met him."

For reply she pointed up the side of the cliff behind where they were standing.

"What do you mean?" asked Nick.

"He went that way, Mr. Carter."

"In that case, he hasn't gone back to the valley. He has only made his escape."

"No," she exclaimed. "Please come! Let us hurry back. Morgan told me with one of his horrible, crazy laughs that he was going back to get the boy. He has gone after Dallas and he will murder him."

"But the man must have known that you would be found here where he left you."

"You forget that he is crazy," she said. "That he does everything on impulse. His cunning only lasts a few moments at a time."

"That is true," said Nick.

"After he tied me here," continued Mrs. Brennan, "he backed off against that rock over there and he stood for a long time with his rifle in his grasp, as if he were meditating whether to leave me here as you found me or to shoot me. Once he half-raised the Winchester and then he lowered it again, laughing as he did so, then he walked away to the edge of the rocks there and, turning his head, shouted out at me:

"'I reckon I'll let you live till I get back with the kid.'

"Then, Mr. Carter, he leaped over the edge of the rock to the bed of the cañon, ran up a ways, stopped, seemed to think for a little while, and then came back again.

"I thought surely he was going to kill me, but instead he passed without a word and climbed out the side of the cañon as I have described."

"Perhaps he changed his mind again and was not going back to the valley, after all. Anyhow, we'll go back there."

Gene Brennan was so worn out with the exciting events through which she had passed, that during the journey back to the valley Nick Carter was compelled to almost carry her, and they necessarily went quite slowly on that account.

When the detective looked at his watch just as they were issuing from the tunnellike passage to the valley, it was exactly noon and it surprised Nick to discover that seven hours had elapsed since he parted with Paul Brennan.

And now, as the detective looked across the valley toward the cliff down which he had descended the preceding night, he saw that one of his former companions, either Hartly or Meyer, was dangling against the side of the cliff, clinging to the rope that he had used himself, and he could see below the forms of two other men whom he knew to be Brennan and the other cow-puncher.

In that comprehensive glance he discovered no sign of Dallas and instantly it came to him that, after all, Gene might have been correct and that Morgan might have returned to the valley by the other route which Hartly had once described, and that, if so, he could not at that moment be far distant.

He might even already have secured possession of Dallas while Paul was standing with his face upraised watching the descent of his two friends from the cliffs above.

Paul might even have left Dallas playing alone somewhere out on the plain.

But Nick did not stop to consider these things. He started forward rapidly, clinging to Gene's hand and dragging her after him at a speed which she could not have endured had she not absorbed some of the excitement he felt at the moment.

As they rushed forward, Nick fired his revolver into the air in order to attract Paul Brennan's attention; but he succeeded in attracting other attention upon which he had not counted.

The echoing report of his own firearm had not ceased ere there was the sharp crack of a rifle from the other side of the valley and Nick Carter heard the singing of a bullet as it zipped past his head in too close proximity for comfort.

This report was immediately followed by another and then another, and then a loud and mocking laugh came to them from high up on the cliffs at the spot whence the shots had sounded.

Nick Carter looked up quickly and there, outlined against the rocks at the top of the cliff for just one instant, he saw the form of Morgan where he stood, with the child raised high above his head as if he were on the point of throwing him down upon the rocks that were more than a hundred feet beneath him.

CHAPTER IX.

NICK CARTER IN A TIGHT PLACE.

For a space of time which could not have occupied more than half a minute, Morgan remained there holding the child suspended over the abyss; then, instead of casting Dallas into the depths below him, he uttered another loud cry and, turning about, disappeared.

Instantly Nick Carter dashed forward toward the base of the cliff beneath where Morgan had been standing, for he remembered enough of the description that Hartly had given him to know that there was located the other entrance to the valley that had been described to him.

As he ran he remembered that he had forgotten to ask Gene Brennan what had become of the horses Morgan had taken out of the valley with him on his first escape from it; but he surmised now that they had been driven on down the cañon; at all events he knew that Morgan could not have taken them with him where he went, and that the madman was as handicapped by being on foot as he was.

And Morgan had the child.

Nick realized that at any instant the crazed man might tire of his burden and hurl it from him over the yawning precipice.

He shouted back to Gene to go to her husband at once, and to tell him about what they had seen; and then he dashed on with all the speed he could command.

He found the trail up the V-shaped place in the mountain exactly as Hartly had described it, and he flung himself up the precipitous place with breathless speed.

At the top—if the place where he finally came out could be called the top—a fairly good path led away over the rocks, and Nick sped along this with all the speed he could assume; and he ran on and on until he was brought to a sudden halt by a loud command, and a man—one who was not Morgan—stepped out from behind a boulder and brought an ugly-looking Winchester to bear upon him.

Nick halted. Who would not do so under the circumstances?

"Hands up!" ordered the man, and Nick obeyed him.

Then, as he did so, two other men made their appearance, and while the first one kept him covered, the others came forward to where the detective was standing and quickly relieved him of his weapons.

It had all happened so quickly and so entirely without warning, and Nick had been dashing along the narrow trail so recklessly, believing that he was pursuing a solitary man and him with a child in his arms, that he had not thought of such a thing as an ambuscade. Indeed, it had not once occurred to him that Morgan's men might be somewhere in the vicinity.

But he was not given time to think upon any of these things.

No sooner was the detective relieved of his weapons than his wrists were bound together firmly behind his back, and then he was pushed forward before his three captors at a speed almost as great as that he had been using at the moment he was interrupted.

They traveled in that manner for upward of half a mile, when they came upon a level place, where Morgan was awaiting them and where there were also horses.

Morgan still held the child in his arms, and the instant that Dallas perceived Nick Carter he held out his small hands toward the detective and cried out plaintively:

"Oh, Mr. Carter, save me from these men! Take me back to my mama and papa."

Morgan's harsh laugh interrupted anything that the detective might have said in reply.

"Oh, yes, he'll take you back, kid, I don't think!" Then he stepped forward and, pointing one finger at the detective, and holding it so closely that it almost touched Nick Carter's face, the madman continued, with another wild laugh:

"You are the gazabo I want! You are the man who struck me with your fist, once. You are the man I want to get even with!" and then, without warning and although Nick stood entirely defenseless before him, with his hands bound behind his back, Morgan raised his fist and hit the detective a crashing blow between the eyes, knocking him down and half stunning him.

Then, before he realized anything that was happening, Morgan gave hasty orders, the detective was lifted from the ground and laid face downward across the back of one of the horses; a rope was passed from his wrists to his ankles under the horse's belly, and he was tied so, utterly helpless, half stunned still from the effect of the blow he had received.

In this position, face down across the horse's back, he could see nothing but the trail over which they were traveling; and he could not see much of that, for the blood rushed to his brain and eyes owing to his position, and he was so uncomfortable that it amounted almost to agony.

Nick Carter never knew how many hours they traveled in that manner.

Part of the time he was unconscious; he had not much realization of distance; he only know that they went up and down, along precipices and through ravines, and that he suffered horribly.

Often his head came into sharp contact with the rocks along the path; again it jutted out over an abyss which seemed to be miles below him; sometimes he could feel the sharp edges of the rocks digging into the flesh of his legs.

Hours, days, years it seemed to him, they traveled on in that manner, and it was nearly dark that evening when a halt was at last called.

When the detective was lifted from his uncomfortable position on the horse at last, and flung upon the

ground as if he had been so much meal, or a sack of potatoes, he had not the energy to raise his eyes to look about him, and it is doubtful if he would quickly have recovered sufficiently to do so had not the voice of little Dallas roused him.

"Oh, Mr. Carter, please speak to Dallas!" he was saying, and Nick opened his eyes to peer into the face of the boy who was bending over him.

Beyond the little lad were other forms, the most prominent among them being Morgan himself, who was grinning down upon the scene with an expression in his eyes so truly fiendish that Nick Carter came as near to shuddering as he ever did.

And near Morgan were five other men, each—if such a thing were possible—more forbidding and repulsive of aspect than his neighbor.

Involuntarily the detective turned his eyes away from them, and then he uttered an exclamation of amazement.

That one quick glance around him had told him, even though darkness had almost fallen, that they had returned again to the valley in the mountains where Paul Brennan, with his wife and child, had so long been kept prisoners.

Nick Carter understood the situation instantly.

Here again was an exhibition of the cunning of a madman.

The consummate cleverness of the move was instantly apparent to the mind of the detective.

At a few minutes after twelve o'clock that day, Morgan had appeared near the top of the cliffs at one side of the valley, holding the child in his arms as if he intended to dash it to its death; then he had turned and fled, pursued by Nick Carter; beyond and behind Nick Carter were three other determined men, two of whom at least would lose no time in also taking the trail, for it would be necessary that one of their number should remain with Gene.

But even they would also follow on along the trail. They would wish to lose no time in leaving all the horrors of that valley as far behind them as possible, and it would never occur to any of them that Morgan would seek to return there with his youthful captive.

But that is exactly what Morgan had done.

He, with the aid of his friends, had first made a captive of the detective, and then they had doubtless traveled by a roundabout way back to the valley, doubtless even drawing aside to some place of concealment while the pursuers passed them.

And inasmuch as Nick had not guessed that Morgan had friends near to him, neither would such an idea occur to Hartly, or Meyer, or Brennan.

They would think as Nick Carter had thought, that Dallas had fallen into the hands of an utterly irresponsible madman, who was fleeing with him through the mountain passes and that sooner or later they would come up with him. The valley, from which all had escaped, would be the very last of all places where it would occur to any of them to seek for Morgan, when the trail was lost, as it would surely be.

In that glance around him Nick Carter thought of all this, and at that instant he experienced more real despair than he remembered ever to have felt before.

Morgan evidently saw and realized this fact, for he grinned more broadly than ever; and with rather surprising lucidity, considering his condition of mind, he bent forward and inquired sardonically:

"I reckon you've discovered where you're at, Mister Nick Carter, from New York, ain't yeh?"

Nick did not reply, but he turned his eyes to one of the other men of the group, and with a coolness he did not feel under the circumstances, he asked:

"Do you men throw in your lots with a madman, I'd like to know?"

The man addressed laughed outright.

"Oho," he said, "you have found out that there are others present, have yeh?"

"Yes," replied Nick. "I see that others are present. I have yet to discover whether they are human beings, or——"

"Say, mister, yeh needn't go any further with that there remark uh yourn. I reckon it ain't a bit necessary. We're human beings, all right; we're men, too, if anybody should ask yeh; we're also friends, and good friends, uh Morgan's. Now what have yeh got to say about it?"

"I'd like to ask you if you consider it manly or

human to persecute a little boy like that one? Why don't you take a man of your size? One who can fight back?"

"I sorta reckon we've got one uh them—in you, mister."

"But that doesn't alter the position of the boy."

"We ain't hurtin' the kid none; not to speak of."

"Why did you steal him away from his parents, then?"

"We didn't. Morgan done that, mister, as you know yourself."

"But you have got him here now, and——"

"Say, you ain't got no call to ask us what we're goin' to do. I reckon as how it ain't none uh your business, and you can't make it none, either. The kid ain't sufferin' any and ain't likely to. Morgan fetched him out uh here when he took the trail so mighty sudden, and he probably saved our lives by coming onto us so sudden just when we was making for the valley expectin' to find him there. Yeh see, mister, we was jest gittin' back after a leetle trip outside, when we met up with him."

"Why have you brought us back here—the boy and me?"

"I reckon because there ain't any other place to take yeh to; will that do?"

"But why do you keep us prisoners? What have you got against the boy?"

"Not a thing in life, mister. For one I heartily wish the kid was back in his own home, along with his mother and popper, where he belongs."

"Then why don't you send him there?"

"Well, we allow as how it wouldn't be exactly safe to do that. However, we ain't had no time to think it over as yet. We'll know more about what we want to do with the boy by morning, I reckon."

"Look here, if it's money you want, I'll——"

"Hold you jaw, now; that is, if you are getting down to your own case."

"I was."

"Well, you see that's different. We know who you are; see? We know why you are here, too. And we know it ain't because you're after the kid, half as much as you are after us."

"But I am. I never heard of you. I don't know you or——"

"Mister, you're a liar. We know. We don't intend that the kid shall be hurted; but as for you—well, that's different."

CHAPTER X.

FROM THE FRYING-PAN TO THE FIRE.

It was very evident to the detective from this remark of the outlaw to whom he was speaking that the man had somehow received a wrong impression concerning his visit to Montana and Idaho. He wondered a few minutes in silence after this declaration of the outlaw, if it could be a part of the cunning on the part of Morgan to mislead these men in that manner, and he determined to find out that point at once.

"I don't even know who you are," he repeated to the outlaw he had been talking to.

"As I remarked a moment ago, mister, you're a liar," reassured the outlaw. "There ain't two ways about it. We got it dead straight and we know."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me your name?"

"Well, I don't see any objection to that, being as how you know it. I'm Cal Barclay, the man you're after."

Now it would have been absurd for Nick to have pretended to this man that he did not know who Cal Barclay was, for he did, but had never seen the man save what he had read in the papers about him and had heard discussed at different times.

But Cal Barclay had for several years been an outlaw of the worst type in that part of the Northwest.

He had begun by rustling cattle and running off horses. He had been a road-agent and a hold-up man, and on two separate occasions he had captained outfits which had held up and robbed the express-car of passenger-trains.

For this offense he had been hunted far and wide throughout the Northwest, until about six months before when it had been given out that Cal Barclay and his following had left the country for Argentina.

The large rewards offered for their capture by the railways and express companies that had been robbed had kept the chase hot after these men for a time, but since the rumor of their departure for other scenes the pursuit had been given up to a great extent, so that for the past half year the man and his following had been almost forgotten.

It was quite true that shortly after one of the train robberies committed by Barclay, Nick Carter was invited to take up the case, but it was also true that inasmuch as he was particularly busy at that time, he was obliged to decline the proposition.

And so, in fact, all that he knew about Barclay was what he had read and heard.

But he saw that the man was very much in earnest in the statement he had just made, and he had no doubt that Barclay was sincere in his belief.

Instead of denying all knowledge of the man, Nick Carter expressed the genuine astonishment he felt at the announcement of the name, and he said:

"So you are Cal Barclay, are you?"

"That sounds just as if you pretended you didn't know it," said Barclay, with a laugh.

"I did not know it," said Nick, "and that is the truth."

"Say, Carter, I hate like blazes to call you a liar so often, but when it comes to me so dead straight as it has, you ought not to put me in a position where I have to tell you so."

"I have told you only the truth," insisted the detective. "I did not know and I had no idea that you were Cal Barclay until you told me so. Since you have told me so, of course, I know who and what you are. But I am not here after you. I have never accepted a case against you, and if you're willing to let me take that little boy away from here and restore him to his parents, and if you will also agree to keep that mad cow-puncher with you until I've got the boy safely out of his reach, I'll promise not to take any case against you until it's offered to me. I mean by that that I won't seek it, and that I won't take after you until I'm asked to do so."

A chorus of laughs in which all of the outlaws joined and which was taken up loudly by the ex-manager of Eighty-three was the reply to this proposition by the detective.

It was fully a minute before Barclay spoke again, and then he did so in a tone which made it evident that he had been considering Nick Carter's words.

"I've always heard that you were a man of your word, Nick Carter," he said.

"Then you've heard nothing but the truth, Cal."

"I've been assured half a dozen times at least that when you make an agreement with a man, whether he's a crook or straight, whether he's a pickpocket or a train-robber, you stand by it till the last ditch."

"I always live up to my agreements no matter with whom they are made, Cal."

"Well, Carter, that being the case, I reckon I'll think over what you said."

He got no further than that, for the remaining outlaws, as if actuated by one impulse, lined up in front of him, each with his gun leveled at Cal Barclay's breast, while at a little distance behind them Tom Morgan chuckled audibly.

Barclay started back violently when he saw the attitude of his followers, and he exclaimed:

"What the devil does this mean, boys?"

"It means," replied one of them quietly, "that it is that detective's life or yours. We're not going to do any fooling in this matter. We've let it be thought that we're way down in Argentina, and now that we're back here on the strict Q. T. and nobody knows, we don't propose to let the information leak out in any way like this. It's up to you, Cal. What you got to say?"

Barclay shrugged his shoulders, laughed aloud, and replied:

"I make it a point, boys, to vote with the majority."

They looked at their weapons and replaced them, and the man who had spoken before continued in the same even voice:

"Then it's settled that the detective cashes in, is it?"

"I vote with the majority," replied Barclay.

"Well, we vote that he cashes in. Now state yours."

"I vote likewise, boys."

"Then we might as well settle right here and now when it's to be done."

Again Barclay shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"Suit yourselves and you'll suit me. You've taken the matter out of my hands. I thought I was chief of this outfit until you lined up in front of me just now. But seeing as how you'd like to run things yourself, you can do it. And you can take my word for it, boys, that you won't run it very far before it will be plumb in the ground."

"We ain't looking to depose you."

"I reckon as how I'm deposed already, the minute you galoots lined up in front of me with your guns, and disclaimed my authority. That settled it. I ain't your chief any longer and you can put that in your pipes and smoke it."

He turned on his heel without more words and started away through the darkness while the rest of the outlaws gazed blankly after him until every one there could hear the creaking of a saddle as he climbed into it, and a moment later heard the sound of horse's hoofs against the earth.

It was evident then to all of them that Cal Barclay had been so deeply offended by the act of his followers that he had deserted them.

For a moment they stared in consternation toward the dark shadows under the rocks where they had last seen him, and then they looked from one to another in silent protest. After a moment, the one who had all along been spokesman, and who now, as if by common consent, had become leader, exclaimed:

"This won't do. It won't do nohow."

"Right you are, Pete," responded one of the men.

"What shall we do about it?" asked the one who was called Pete.

"I vote we take after him and bring him back or else go on with him," said another.

That they were men of few words was evident, and those few words had been spoken. As with one impulse, they turned and scurried away through the darkness toward their horses, and the sounds that followed a few moments later told Nick Carter as plainly as words could have done that he had been left alone, bound and utterly helpless, at the mercy of the madman Morgan.

Tom Morgan himself seemed not at all to comprehend what had been taking place, or to understand that the men who had been his companions in crime had now deserted him.

He was still chuckling audibly to himself, now rubbing his hands together as if he were washing them and wiping them, and again slapping his thighs with resounding whacks while he uttered shouts of laughter that echoed back from the walls by which they were surrounded.

Nick Carter remained perfectly motionless as well as silent.

He hoped in that moment that Morgan might forget his existence, as indeed he apparently would have done, had it not been for an accident that recalled the fact to him.

The madman seemed suddenly to become conscious of the desertion that had taken place, and he turned first one way and then another, calling out as he did so, at first softly and then more loudly:

"Cal, Peter, Sim, where are you?"

There was, of course, no answer to these appeals, and after looking wildly about him several times, Morgan started forward quickly and so stumbled over the prostrate form of the detective where it was lying upon the ground.

In an instant he leaped to his feet and turned savagely. Then he dropped to one knee over the detective and peered intently into his face.

"Ah, so it is you. The Nick Carter man from the East. The detective. The man who struck me with his fist and against whom I have sworn vengeance. Well, I've got you anyhow, if the others have gone."

Nick almost shuddered at the ferocity in the man's manner, and when we consider how utterly helpless he was, the fact is not surprising.

CHAPTER XI.

NICK CARTER'S YOUTHFUL CHAMPION.

Those who have followed Nick Carter through these histories of his career know that he never lost his nerve. He did not do so now.

He looked up calmly into the eyes of the madman and, calling into play all the resources of subtlety he possessed, he smiled, and exclaimed as if he had just discovered the crazed man's presence near him:

"Hello, Tom Morgan. How are you?"

But Morgan had far too much sense left to be taken in by any such subterfuge, and although he grinned in reply it was nevertheless an extremely unpleasant expression that he used.

"I reckon you knowed I was here," he said.

"How are you, Tom?" repeated Nick, in the same hearty manner he had used before, and still smiling.

"Oh, I'm all right, Carter, if it interests you to know; and I'm a heap sight better than you will be when I get through with you."

"What are you going to do with me, Tom?"

The giant cow-puncher deliberately seated himself on the grass beside Nick and, drawing a knife from a sheath he carried in his belt, began to whet it upon his bootleg, grinning as he did so.

"If your hide is as tough as I think it is, I'll skin you and tan it, and maybe use it for a saddle-flap," he said; and then as if the expression tickled his sense of humor, he shouted aloud with laughter.

Happening to raise his eyes at that moment, they encountered some glowing embers that remained of the fire of the preceding night, and he started quickly to his feet.

"I know!" he cried aloud, with another exultant laugh. "I know what to do with you now, by thunder! I'll roast you."

"Roast me?" replied Nick. "Why should you do that?"

Morgan stopped and appeared to think deeply for a moment, and then he chuckled aloud and replied:

"Maybe it's because I'd like to get ahead of the other fellow that'll roast you after you're dead, if I don't do it beforehand."

"Isn't that taking an unfair advantage?" asked Nick.

"That's my business. Anyhow, you've got to roast."

He started away rapidly at that, leaving the detective where he was, and Nick, after managing to turn upon his side, could see him working near the scene of the explosion and fire; and although he could not see plainly enough to determine what Morgan was doing, he could guess fairly well concerning his occupation.

He was not, however, left long in doubt, for after an absence that might have consumed half an hour —or twice as long for all Nick could tell about it— Morgan returned and, stooping over the detective, he lifted him from the ground as easily as if he had been a child.

When Nick thought about that fact, and compared the strength of the man with his own weight, as if one were a giant and the other a child, it suddenly came back to him that during the last few minutes he had utterly forgotten little Dallas; and now as the big cow-puncher lifted him from the ground, he looked around in every direction, as well as he could see through the darkness, searching for some sign of the boy.

He was quite sure in his own mind that the outlaws had not taken Dallas with them. The boy had been in plain view after Cal's departure, and the other men would not have bothered themselves about him.

Where, then, was Dallas?

It was quite evident that Morgan had also forgotten the lad, or, at least, gave no sign of remembering him. But having picked Nick Carter up in his arms, he strode rapidly toward the scene of the fire, near which Nick presently discovered that the madman had erected a post in the ground, to which he now proceeded to bind his captive.

For the first time since he had been rendered helpless, Nick Carter attempted to struggle for his liberty, but he quickly found that every effort he could make was utterly useless, since he was not only himself bound and helpless, but Morgan was possessed of gigantic strength, which now seemed to be doubled, or even tripled, in his crazed condition.

In less time than it takes to tell it, Nick Carter was

bound firmly to the stake, the act being done by means of a noose slipped over his head and over the stake, at the same time passed down under his arms and then drawn painfully tight, after which Morgan walked round and round the post, winding the rope as he went, until Nick Carter was triced there as firmly, as compactly, and as immovably as ever a mummy of Egypt was wrapped in its sheets.

Morgan made fast the loose end of the rope with a very simple knot, for it needed only to be held in place, since having been wound first upward and then downward around Nick's body and the post, it held him without power to move a muscle.

After that, the madman backed off a little distance and stood there quite a time regarding the detective.

Presently he began to giggle, then he laughed, and finally he shouted aloud with maniacal joy.

The paroxyism passed quite suddenly, as they do with deranged minds, and the desire for activity came again to the demented man.

He seized the shovel with which he had dug the hole in which the post was placed, and ran with it in his hands toward the glowing coals among the ruins of the house; and presently he was back again with the shovel filled with them, and these he deposited on the ground quite near to Nick Carter's feet, but sufficiently far away so that there was no immediate danger of actual contact; then he repeated the errand again and again.

He made the journeys to and from the fire, each time bearing a shovelful of coals, until two-thirds of a circle of them was formed around the detective where he was bound at the stake, and until the heat that arose from them was becoming intense and exceedingly oppressive.

It seemed to Nick Carter that nothing could save him now from the frenzy of the madman. He had no reason to hope for the return of Cal Barclay, or of any of the men who had followed after him; and he had still less hope that Dick and Con or Paul could be anywhere within reach.

He believed that his friends were wandering somewhere in the mountains in search of the trail, or had camped near where it was lost, with that dogged determination he knew Dick Hartly to possess, of picking it up and following it again in the morning.

But all this time Morgan was continuing his journeys to and from the fire, bringing the red-hot coals and cinders from it and heaping them in a circle around Nick Carter. It seemed quite evident that he was going to carry out his idea of roasting the detective. It would have been an easier and quicker method for him had he piled some of the unburned timbers closely up against the detective and dragged the fire in among them. But by the method he was pursuing he was literally creating an oven in which, without doubt, the insane creature intended to roast his victim to death.

The circle of fire was almost drawn together and the heat from it had become intolerable, when out of the darkness into the circle of light the little figure of Dallas Brennan suddenly appeared.

It was while Morgan was on his way from the stake to the scene of the wrecked house for another shovelful of coals, and, therefore, while his back was turned toward Nick Carter, that Dallas appeared.

Remember, if you please, that he was only four years old. Imagine him, if you can, so small and yet so brave, darting forward like a little sprite, bearing in his small, clenched hand the huge and formidable knife which Morgan not very long ago had whetted against his bootleg, and which he had inadvertently dropped and left where he had been using it.

With wonderful directness and quickness for one so young, Dallas leaped over the circle of fire and slashed, with the knife he held, against the rope where it was drawn tightly in contact with the post to which Nick Carter was bound.

The strain that had been placed upon it rendered it taut and easily subject to the keen edge of the knife, so that when the boy leaned his weight upon the blade, pressing it against the rope, the latter snapped quickly; and because it was held only by a slip-noose at one end, and by the slightest and simplest kind of a knot at the other, and had been wound round and round the post and the man's body, it fell away suddenly and quickly the instant the blade of the knife cut through it.

But Nick Carter's hands were still bound behind his back with other thongs, and his ankles were still tied tightly together.

Nevertheless, the moment the rope that held him to the stake fell away, Nick managed to make one leap upward and outward so that he cleared the ring of fire and fell upon his face beyond it.

"Quick, Dallas!" he called out to his youthful champion, even while he was falling. "Cut the ropes that hold my hands together. Cut them quickly!"

Dallas, much wiser than his years, and much more comprehending than one would suppose him to be, leaped out from the ring of fire and once more slashed away with his knife. The fact that he cut the detective's hands in freeing him was unknown to either of them at the time, and it was not five seconds after the time Dallas first appeared, before Nick Carter seized the knife in his freed hands, slashed through the ropes that bound his ankles together, and sprang erect with the weapon that had so lately reposed in Tom Morgan's belt, safely in his grasp.

And at that moment Morgan turned and started toward the stake again with another shovelful of coal.

CHAPTER XII.

A MIDNIGHT WRESTLING-MATCH.

Nick Carter, under the circumstances then existing, would not have apprehended the least difficulty in overcoming the madman had it not been for the fact that he was compelled also to protect little Dallas while doing so, and as the detective watched the madman's approach he realized that the next few moments must be fraught with a peril that was even greater than any he had as yet encountered.

Not with peril to himself; he was not thinking of that; but with danger to the boy who had already given evidence of so much bravery for one so young; so much indeed that Nick did not doubt that the little fellow might even attempt to take a hand in the struggle which now seemed to be impending.

The circle of glowing coals around the now vacant post where Nick had been tied gave forth a glow which plainly lighted up the scene, revealing Nick where he stood awaiting the approach of his mad enemy; and beside him the child whom he sought to protect.

Nevertheless Morgan did not appear to discover them until he was within twenty feet of the stake; and then he took cognizance of the fact in a manner quite different from any that Nick had expected.

Morgan stopped in his tracks, stared a moment, and then burst into a crazy laugh.

And he laughed on immoderately for a considerable time, whacking his thighs with the flat of his hands for emphasis, and otherwise disporting himself as if he were intensely amused at something.

Throughout this scene the detective remained motionless where he was, with the child beside him and a trifle to the rear; and while he waited he spoke in a low tone to the boy.

"Dallas," he said, "can you hear what I say to you, now?"

"Yes, sir," was the marvelously calm reply. Dallas seemed to realize perfectly the imminent danger that was at hand.

"Will you obey me, Dallas, if I tell you what to do?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, as soon as Morgan comes nearer to us, I shall try to overcome him; I shall try to throw him to the ground and bind him, without hurting him. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"You see, Dallas, he is only crazed. He does not know what he is doing; he does not realize what he has been doing, and so I don't want to hurt him unless I have to do so in order to save your life and mine. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Therefore I shall only hold this knife in my hand long enough to frighten him, if that is possible; but when he comes close enough I shall throw the knife away and wrestle with him. You know what it means to wrestle, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Now, the moment I begin to wrestle with that

man, I want you to run away into the darkness and lie down somewhere, flat upon the ground, so that he cannot see you; but you must run a considerable distance, so you will be entirely out of sight. Will you do that?"

"Of course I will, Mr. Carter, if you tell me to do so."

"That is right. And you must stay where you hide yourself until I call to you. There, he is coming now. Be ready, and when you think he is not looking at you, run away."

Morgan had begun a stealthy approach by this time. The laughter had ceased and once more the scowl of malignity had appeared on his face, and the wild look had returned to his eyes.

Nick Carter had been entirely sincere in what he said to Dallas, for he did not wish to hurt the man if it were possible to overcome him without doing so. Morgan was utterly irresponsible for his acts. He was merely an insane person, and as such the detective felt a great pity for him.

Nevertheless the detective knew perfectly well that he was undertaking a terribly big contract in making such an effort to overcome him.

Morgan was not only a giant in stature, but he was muscularly a Hercules, as well; and in addition to that he possessed now all that frenzied strength which proverbially belongs to insane persons.

The man was unarmed, fortunately.

The knife, which he had dropped and forgotten, had apparently been the only weapon he possessed; and he seemed not to remember anything about that at all.

He came forward slowly toward the detective, crouching a trifle, and assuming a position not unlike the one you have seen represented in pictures of Jeffries, the pugilist, in his fighting pose.

Doubtless he could see the knife in Nick Carter's grasp, but he paid not the slightest attention to it; and, after watching him for a moment, Nick calmly threw the weapon from him, casting it away in the darkness, notwithstanding the fact that in doing so he was risking his own life and possibly the life of the boy as well.

But the detective could not bring himself to fight with a weapon against an unarmed man; still less could he consider himself as stabbing with that weapon one who had utterly lost all sense of reason and who was as utterly irresponsible for his acts as Morgan was at that moment.

But if Morgan had not noticed the knife when Nick still held it in his hand, he did see it when the detective cast it aside; and he seemed to realize then that his supposed foe was suddenly placed on an even footing with himself.

With a yell which might well have startled any man he leaped forward full at the detective's throat, with his huge fingers extended as if he would seize and choke whatever they could grasp.

And so the two men came together.

A madman at such time becomes in effect a wild beast.

His only impulse is to tear and rend, and he is utterly insensible to pain and injury himself.

Nick was aware of this. He was mindful of the fact that if he overcame Morgan at all, it must be accomplished very quickly indeed, and he sought to practise some of the arts of ju-jutsu upon him.

But as if aware of the detective's intention, Morgan managed to meet the attempt with a move that disconcerted Nick's effort, and the result of it was that they came together in a regular old-fashioned "clinch," such as you have doubtless heard described many times.

Morgan managed to seize Nick around the body. He did not attempt to strike with his fists, and Nick had no opportunity to do so.

The detective felt himself lifted bodily from the ground, and then was aware that Morgan was trying to twist him around in the old "cart-wheel" movement, which, if he had succeeded, would have meant that Nick would be speedily dashed to the ground and left there stunned and half senseless for the madman to trample upon at his leisure.

But even as Morgan made that mad effort, Nick managed to change his own hold, and to do so in a manner which gave him a slight advantage.

He grasped Morgan's heavy shock of hair in the fingers of his right hand, and at the same time locked his left forearm around the bull-neck of the man; and then, exerting all his great strength, he began slowly but surely to pull the big head backward until there came an instant when he could give it a sudden and terrific wrench; and at that selfsame instant he took away his arm that was around Morgan's neck and struck him against the Adam's apple with the edge of his left hand!

It happened just at the instant when Nick himself was on the point of giving way and falling a victim to the madman.

But the effect of that terrific blow was instantaneous.

Morgan, with a gurgling cry, collapsed upon the ground beneath the detective, dragging him down with him; but all the strength and desire for fight was taken out of the madman. Indeed, he was almost insensible. The same blow delivered against the throat of a less powerful man, must have nearly killed him.

But also another thing happened at the same instant.

Just as Morgan fell to the ground with the detective, there was a loud shout from somewhere out in the darkness.

Nick had a confused idea of the sound of rushing feet approaching him; and then, before he could struggle out from beneath the huge form of his adversary, who had fallen atop of him, willing and forceful hands seized upon them both, pulled them apart, stood them on their feet, and before Nick Carter had an opportunity fully to realize what had happened, Morgan was bound firmly in the coils of a ready lariat.

It was the timely arrival upon the scene of Dick Hartly, Con Meyer, and Paul Brennan that had wrought all this change in the scene.

They had come out upon the rocks where Nick Carter had first made his descent into the valley, and where the rope he had used still dangled in the air. From that spot they could neither see nor hear what was going on down there, but they had determined that they would descend into the valley, believing it to be deserted now.

And so Paul had gone down the rope first; then the end of it had been drawn up, tied around Gene under her arms, and she was lowered to her husband; and then the two cow-punchers had followed after.

Once upon the floor of the valley they had made their way toward the place where the house once stood, and as they approached it, had naturally discovered what was taking place there.

It required only a few moments of reconnoitering for them to learn all that was necessary for them to know; and then they had rushed forward, arriving just in time, as we have seen.

* * * * * * *

It should be said here that nothing more was seen of Cal Barclay and his men.

Whether they got together again or not, does not appear here; that is another story.

But Tom Morgan, now a raving maniac indeed, although there were intervals when he was entirely lucid and reasonable, was taken to the nearest town and turned over to the county authorities, to be cared for by them and ultimately to be conveyed to an asylum for the insane; and it was a sheriff by the name of Pavey upon whom this duty devolved.

Paul Brennan, by reason of his local influence, arranged for all that; and as soon as it was done Nick Carter accompanied Paul and Gene to their home on the ranch, already mentioned, and, of course, Dick Hartly and Con Meyer went with them.

"Nick," said Paul, shortly after their arrival, "I have made up my mind since this last adventure that I will take the boy out of this country. I'll take him to Washington, where he can be educated. The old senator wants us there, and Genie wishes to go; so I shall sell out at once."

It was not many months after that when the detective received a letter at his home in New York, telling him the sale had been accomplished, and that the Brennans were no longer residents of the great Northwest.

THE END.

The next number, 615, will contain "A Million-dollar Hold-up; or, Nick Carter After the Train Robbers."

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THE BOATSWAIN'S WHISTLE.

By ROGER STARBUCK.

My chum Winder sometimes relates the following story:

The weather was cold and gloomy. The morning sun tinged the mist with a strange light like that observed by a diver under water. The ship was running along at the rate of four or five knots, with close-reefed topsails and a topmast-staysail; for we were cruising off the coast of Patagonia.

Suddenly we heard a strange, whistling noise directly ahead of us. It sounded something like the piping of a boatswain, and, much astonished, we crowded around the knightheads, the rails, and in the fore-rigging, peering eagerly through the fog. The water was visible only to the distance of half a ship's length; the noise seemed farther off.

I happened to glance at the mate, who had come forward. His face was quite pale, and I thought I could observe his hand tremble. As he was in the habit of drinking, however, this did not surprise me.

Meanwhile, the piping sound continued, and the vessel still glided upon her course; but the author of the strange noise remained invisible. We all exchanged glances; the mate shuddered.

"It's mystifying enough!" exclaimed an old man-o'-war's man, with little bandy legs, small waist, and an enormous breadth of shoulders. "I just wish this strange bos'n would show himself like an honest tar, and not be playing hide-and-seek with us in this fashion."

"You think, like the rest of us, that it's some curious bird," remarked one of the men. "Don't you?"

"Aye, aye," answered the old fellow, refreshing himself with nearly the half of a plug of pigtail, "it must be a bird, seeing as it couldn't be anything else; and the reason we can't see the creature is because it's flying on ahead of us."

"It is not a bird," said the mate, in a low but decided voice. "No bird ever made such a strange noise as that."

So saying, he shrugged his shoulders and shook his head with a mysterious air that provoked every man's curiosity.

"Will you please tell us what you think it is, sir?" inquired the old sailor.

"No," was the gloomy answer, and the speaker walked aft.

Such behavior surprised us, for the first officer was generally willing to oblige the "veteran of the forecastle," as we termed the man-o'-war's man.

The whistling by this time had ceased; but we all listened attentively, expecting every moment to hear it again. We were disappointed—the day passed without a repetition of the mysterious sound.

At eight bells, in the first night watch, I stood by the helm, steering. The darkness was but faintly relieved by the single lantern hung up in the mizzen rigging, nevertheless I recognized the long proportions of the mate's figure, as he suddenly emerged from the cabin.

The officer of the watch was his best friend. He walked to his side, and, laying a hand upon his shoulder, inquired if the whistling had as yet been repeated.

"No," was the answer; "but why do you tremble so? What is the matter?"

The odor of gin being perceptible, it struck me that the question was superfluous.

I soon changed my mind, for the first officer thus replied:

"Tom Winfield, you don't know how I hate that noise! I have reason to hate it, and I will tell you why. Several years ago I was in the sloop-o'-war *L*——. One dark night the boatswain offended me, and as we were alone near one of the ports forward, screened by a couple of long nine-pounders, I thought I would give him a sound drubbing. I seized him by the throat in such a way that he could not speak. We struggled. His foot slipped, and he fell headlong through the port-hole, the splashing of his body being unheard amid the howling of the gale. Ah, Tom, Heaven help me! but as sure as I'm a living man, I heard his whistle piping shrilly above the loud roar and clash of the waters for several minutes after the accident."

"Of course, you shouted, 'Man overboard!' and had a boat lowered?"

"No, curse me for a coward, I did not. I was afraid that I would be suspected of having purposely pushed into the sea a man who a few days previously had flogged me while I was lashed to the gratings. Aye, aye, and so I kept a still tongue while the 'strange disappearance'—as it was termed—of the boatswain was being commented upon both fore and aft. None of my shipmates seemed to have heard that piping noise; but I feel quite confident that the poor man sounded his whistle while in the water."

"And that is why the noise we heard this morning——"

"Aye, aye," gasped the mate, "that is why the noise has affected me so terribly. I feel as if it is a judgment—some awful judgment from——"

He paused, trembling in every limb; for at this moment the strange piping rose loud and shrill above the roar of the blast.

The drunken officer sprang to the lee rail and, leaning far across it, peered with shrinking glance into the foaming caldron of waters. The ship rolled suddenly, and over he went with a wild scream.

A boat was lowered, but he was never seen again.

The piping noise continued at intervals throughout the night. In the morning, the fog having cleared, we discovered that the supposed ghost of the boatswain was a strange, hideous-looking fish, which, when uttering the noise described, would leap its full length out of the water.

We captured the monster, and brought it aboard. As it expired it rolled its strange eyes upward with an expression of almost human intelligence.

A Kanaka, who had been a shipmate with the first officer in the sloop-of-war *L*——, declared that he saw in those dying eyes an expression that reminded him of the lost boatswain.

This idea was, of course, scouted by all hands; nevertheless, it startled Winfield and me, for we had not revealed to the Kanaka, nor, in fact, to any of the rest of our companions, the story related by the unfortunate mate on the previous night.

I will add that, at the time I speak of, there were many Kanakas who believed that the souls of the dead entered the bodies of sharks and other fishes.

DIAMONDS A DOLLAR EACH.

He was dressed like a miner, a rather prosperous proprietor of a nice little mine, the sort of looking person likely to be seen in an Arizona town buying mining supplies, with good credit at the store. His hair was longish, but not so long as to suggest the familiar brand of long-haired faker, and his sombrero, corduroy clothes, and top-boots were just right for the part.

At the corner of Broadway and Vesey Street, New York, he set up such a stand as fiddlers rest their sheet music on, and when he laid a large sheet of cardboard on it it began to look as if he might be going to do some sort of musical stunt in spite of his make-up. But when he dramatically threw aside a piece of fine linen which had draped his card and disclosed that it was sparkling with closely pinned things which looked like diamonds the inevitable crowd pushed close with interest.

He looked over the crowd with a doubtful smile, shook his head as one who saw no prospect of trade, seemed as if he were about to pack up and hike to more knowing parts, but then turned and said:

"Boys, they are not worth a blamed cent. I'm selling them for a buck a throw—a dollar each—but take it from me, they are just shines."

He smiled pleasantly, and the growing numbers, liking what he had said and his smile, smiled back at him.

"I may as well tell you that they are good for nothing, for you may believe that, but you'd give me the laugh if I told you what they really are."

He paused thoughtfully, gave a look at his wares, then looked over the crowd again, puzzled.

"I'll tell you what, boys," he resumed, as if a happy thought had come to him, "some of you may know what's what in this business. This isn't far from Maiden Lane. they tell me, where the real goods are sold. Any one here know a real thing if he sees it? Oh, they are not worth a cent, of course, but if any of you boys——"

He stopped to eye sharply a man who edged in from the outskirts of the crowd. This was a substantial-looking citizen, who, paying no attention to spectators or salesmen, took one of the brilliant things out of the card and examined it carefully. His interest suddenly and greatly increased. He took a jeweler's magnifying-glass from his vest pocket, adjusted it to an eye expertly, viewed the sparkler thus for several seconds, then said, "A dollar each?"

"A dollar each," replied the salesman.

"I'll take the lot," said the man, his voice trembling a little.

The salesman scowled, then said bruskly, "You've got another guess coming, friend. They are a dollar each, but only one to a buyer."

The man with the magnifying-glass looked much disappointed and seemed about to protest.

"No use registering any kick at this game," said the salesman. "I'm obeying orders. I don't ask any questions myself and I don't answer any. Some folks say there are diamonds in Arizona, some say there are none. I'm not saying a word. Some one may be wanting to introduce a few of these stones in order to place a big mining property in Wall Street. Maybe not. Take your choice, please, and let some of the boys have a chance."

The man took his choice, paid for it, and departed. Then the spectators began to buy and the card was almost cleared before a cop sauntered up and said "G'wan."

The salesman g'wanned. Half an hour later he was on the water-front, the card replenished, and when the man with the magnifying-glass had finished his part of the turn petty officers from liners and others of their class had the card wholly cleared before a traffic squad cop came up and said "G'wan."

GUARDING PAPER MONEY.

The paper money of the Government is brought in iron-bound chests, locked and sealed, from the Bureau of Engraving and Printing to the cash room or the Treasury and there delivered upon receipt to James A. Sample, chief of the division of issue, in sheets of four bills each. They are complete with signature and numbers, except for the seal, which is printed upon them with power presses in a small apartment under the cash room.

These presses are worked by two people, usually a man pressman, and a woman feeder, or assistant. When the seal has been imprinted upon the bills they are counted automatically, bound in packages of equal numbers by bands of paper, marked, signed by the persons who have handled them, and passed into the adjoining room, where the sheets are cut, the bills are recounted and inspected, so that imperfect ones may be thrown out. They are then bound into packages of equal amounts and taken to the drying vault, where they lie upon the shelves for several weeks, until the ink has become perfectly dry.

Every safeguard that ingenuity can contrive is placed around these transactions, and the chief of division can tell which of his hundred or more subordinates have touched the different bills in the vaults. He knows who received them, who printed the seal, who wrapped and cut them; for every package is numbered and its history is recorded in an enormous book.

The combination of checks is so complete that Mr. Sample would know within twenty minutes if a single bill were missing, but he has never had occasion to test this knowledge except twice within fifteen years. Only two attempts have ever been made to steal the money of the Government while it is in this stage of its history.

On one occasion, many years ago, a pressman passing a pile of notes upon the table of his neighbor, slipped the top sheet under his blouse without being observed and carried it with him into the lavatory, where he was successful in concealing it. The theft was discovered within five minutes and it was clearly apparent that he alone could be guilty, although the evidence was purely circumstantial. No one saw him take the money. Therefore he was not arrested and was never publicly charged with the crime. But he was dismissed from the service and he knew the reason why. The bills were never recovered. He probably destroyed them, as they did not appear in circulation.

On another occasion eight or ten years ago, a colored messenger, whose business was to haul the money about on a cart, slipped a loose sheet into his pocket unobserved while passing between the printing and the counting rooms. This theft was also unseen, but the responsibility was fastened upon him. The pile of notes was complete when it left the printer, for it was counted and registered automatically in the press. When it reached the counting room, one sheet was missing, and the package had not been out of the possession of the colored messenger in the meantime. Therefore he alone was responsible, and as he could not offer any satisfactory explanation, he too was dismissed from the service, but was not prosecuted because there was no direct proof of his guilt.

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We give herewith a list of all the back numbers in print. You can have your newsdealer order them or they will be sent direct by the publishers to any address upon receipt of the price in money or postage stamps.

231—Nick Carter's Thumb Clue.
232—Nick Carter and the Blue Death.
234—Nick Carter's Crooked Trail.
235—Nick Carter's False Clue.
243—Nick Carter and the Phantom of Poverty Lane.
244—Nick Carter Winning a Close Game.
246—Nick Carter On and Off the Scent.
252—Nick Carter and the Langwor-thy Treasure.
253—Nick Carter Forging the Fet-ters.
254—Nick Carter from Peril to Peril.
257—Nick Carter in a Finish Fight.
258—Nick Carter and the Triple Identity.
259—Nick Carter and the "Queen of Diamonds."
260—Nick Carter and the Missing Jewels.
261—Nick Carter's Great Success.
262—Nick Carter's Search for a Motive.
263—Nick Carter's Double Capture.
264—Nick Carter's Capture of the Jenkins Brothers.
267—Nick Carter's Suicide Mystery.
270—Nick Carter's Diamond Trail.
272—Dazaar, the Arch Fiend.
273—The Queen of the Siren.
274—The Sign of the Dagger.
275—The Devil Worshipers.
277—The Last of the Seven.
278—Ten Ichi, the Wonderful.
279—The Mystery of the Maldo.
281—The Crime Behind the Throne.
282—Holding Up a Nation.
283—Stolen by Broad Daylight.
285—The Secret Order of Associated Wrong.
286—When Aces Were Trumps.
287—The Gambler's Last Hand.
288—The Murder at Linden Fells.
289—Mercedes Danton's Double.
290—The Millionaire's Nemesis.
291—A Princess of the Under-world.
292—A Queen of Her Kind.
293—Isabel Benton's Trump Card.
294—A Prince of Hades.
401—The House with the Open Door.
402—The Society of Assassination.
404—The Trail of the Vampire.
405—Demons of the Night.
406—The Captain of the Vampire.
407—A Bank President's Plot.
408—The Masked Criminal.
409—The Carruthers Puzzle.
410—Inez, the Mysterious.
411—The Criminal Queen's Oath.
412—The Point of a Dagger.
422—By Command of the Czar.
423—The Conspiracy of an Empire.
424—A Queen of Vengeance.
429—The Phantom Highwayman.
430—A Million Dollar Hold-up.
431—Nick Carter and the Man with the Crooked Mind.
432—Nick Carter's Occult Enemy.
433—The Pirate of the Sound.
434—The Cruise of the Shadow.
435—A Prince of Impostors.
436—The Mystery of John Dash-wood.
437—Following a Blind Trail.
438—The Crime of the Potomac.
439—In the Shadow of Death.
440—The Fear-Haunted Broker.
441—The Greenhouse Tragedy.
442—A Clever Grab.
443—The Mystery of the Front Room.
444—The Crime of Union Square.
445—A Millionaire Criminal.
446—The Broadway Cross.
447—The Princess Passes.
448—The Quexel Tragedy.
450—Missing; a Sack of Gold.
451—The Great Cathedral Mystery.
452—A Play for a Million.
453—The Pear-Shaped Diamonds.
455—Nick Carter's Human Weapon.
456—The Compact of Death.
457—The Ralph Inheritance.
458—A Tragedy of the Sea.
460—Kidnaped Children.
461—Nick Carter's Strange Power.
462—Nick Carter and the Marix-bury Affair.
463—The Millionaire Crackman.
464—The Man in the Dory.
465—Scylla the Sea Robber.
466—The Beautiful Pirate of Oyster Bay.
467—The Man from Nevada.
468—Kidnaping Mr. Rockwell.
469—Pedro, the Dog Detective.
470—A Warning to Fiend.
471—Bellini, the Black Hand.
472—The Black Hand's Nemesis.
473—An Expert in Graft.
474—Nick Carter's Terrible Experience.
475—The Mystery of an Untold Wrong.
476—Diana, the Arch-demon.
477—Captain Satan, the Unknown.
478—A Wizard of the Highway.
479—Abducted in Broad Day.
480—The Tong of the Tailless Dragon.
481—The Padlocked Mystery.
482—Denis, Detective.
483—Nick Carter's Murder Problem.
484—A Battle Among the Clouds.
485—The Veiled Princess.
486—The Conquest of a Kingdom.
487—The Horde of Skeletons.
488—A Queen of Inferno.
489—Nick Carter's Foxy Adversary.
490—Three Times in Peril.
491—The Gold Lettered Dagger.
492—That Mysterious Affair.
493—A Dead Guardian of Millions.
494—The Mysterious Hundred.
495—The Klondike Bank Puzzle.
496—The "Red Man" of Nome.
497—The Black Flag of Piracy.
498—Following an Ocean Trail.
499—A Clue from the Clouds.
500—Praxatel, of the Ironarm.
501—The Man from Montana.
502—Ismalia, the Chieftain.
503—Nick Carter's Earthquake Clue.
504—Nick Carter, Among the Bad Men.
505—The Isle of Many Faces.
506—Again from the Dead.
507—Bare-faced Jimmy, the Gentleman Crook.
508—The Gentleman Crook's Last Act.
509—The "Skiddoo" of the K. U. & T.
510—The Last of the Outlaws.
511—Nick Carter's Twin Mystery.
512—A Battle of Wits.
513—The Mystery of Mr. Phoenix.
514—Codman the Poisoner.
515—The Plot of the Poisoner.
516—The Mechanical Giant.
517—Doris, the Unknown.
518—A Dangerous Woman.
519—Madge Morley's Ghost.
520—A Stormy Night Mystery.
521—The Mysterious Stranger.
522—The White Arm of a Woman.
523—The Man in the Doorway.
524—The Plot of the Baron.
525—The Passenger on the Night Local.
526—A Double Mystery.
527—Nick Carter, the Countess.
528—Clarice, the Women Detective
529—The Plot of Seven Sisters.
530—An Amazonian Queen.
531—A Blackmailer's Paradise.
532—Gipsy Maxine, the Blackmailer
533—Facing an Unseen Terror.
534—Dayah, the Woman of Mystery.
535—The Mine of Skulls.
536—The Empire of a Goddess.
537—Zanabeyah, the Terrible.
538—The Seven-headed Monster.
539—The Woman of the Mask.
540—The Masked Woman's Daring Plot.
541—Hobo Harry, the Beggar King.
542—Black Madge's Hobo Gang.
543—Black Madge's Vengeance.
544—A Tragedy of the Footlights.
545—The Maynard Woman's Double.
546—Three Against Fifteen.
547—A Mystery of Two Passengers.
548—A Dead Man at the Feast.
549—The House of Secrets.
550—The Lost Rock President.
551—Ralph Bolton's Double Plot.
552—The Dare-devil Crook.
553—A Mystery from the Klondyke.
554—Behind Five Graves.
555—The Mystery Man of 7-Up Gulch.
556—A Bad Man of Montana.
557—The Man from Arizona.
558—Kid Curry's Last Stand.
559—A Beautiful Anarchist.
560—The Nihilist's Second Move.
561—The Brotherhood of Free Russia.
562—A White House Mystery.
563—The Great Spy System.
564—The Last of Monteshini.
565—Secrets of a Haunted House.
566—A Mystery in India Ink.
567—The Plot of the Stantons.
568—The Criminal Trust.
569—The Syndicate of Crooks.
570—The Order of the Python.
571—The Fatal Ruby Life.
572—A Bargain With a Thief.
573—Peters, the Shrewd Crook.
574—The Mystery of the Empty Grave.
575—The Yellow Beryl.
576—The Dead Man on the Roof.
577—A Double-barreled Puzzle.
578—An Automobile Duel.
579—Jasper Ryan's Counter Move.
580—An International Conspiracy.
581—Plotters Against a Nation.
582—Mignon Dupres, the Female Spy.
583—A Mystery of High Society.
584—A Million Dollar Reward.
585—The Signal of Seven Shots.
586—"Shadow."
587—A Dead Man's Secret.
588—A Victim of Magic.
589—A Battle Within a Palace.
590—The Countess Zeta's Defense.
591—The Prince of Liars.
592—The Two Lost Chittendens.
593—Tekla, the Geisha Girl.
603—Cry Order of the Emperor.
604—The Convict's Secret.
605—The Man in the Dark.
606—An Anarchist Plot.
607—The Mysterious Mr. Peters.
608—A Woman at Bay.
609—The Balloon Tragedy.
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